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Guest Editor: Miško Šuvaković

Introduction to Thematic Block:  
CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS OF  
ARCHITECTURE AND VISUAL ARTS

*The Serbian Society for Aesthetics of Architecture and Visual Arts* was established with the intentions of forming, development and implementation of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary scientific/theoretical researches of architecture and visual arts in the national culture, and also at the international, global and cosmopolitan level. In program sense “aesthetics” in *aesthetics of architecture* and *aesthetics of visual arts* syntagms is postulated as general and open theoretical inter- and trans- disciplinary theoretical practice. In contemporary hybrid aesthetic studies frameworks there emerge the critique debates of architecture, art, culture, media, society, poetics, theory, philosophy and aesthetics of architecture and visual arts. Nowadays aesthetics is redefined and re-contextualized from the philosophical science or philosophical aesthetics on sensorial cognition and consideration of the natural and human world into theoretical practice of analysis, criticism, deconstruction, interpretation and debate of complex disciplinary, cultural, architectural and art apparatuses and discourses. The prospective of contemporary aesthetics are not single gender ones but belong to completely different scientific/theoretical platforms the starting points of which could be in philosophy, the humanities, cultural studies and media studies, namely in the practices and theories of architecture and art. When today one speaks about aesthetics of architecture and visual arts it concerns the “applied” theories. I.e. the applied aesthetics, applied philosophy, critic theory and hybrid theorizing.

The work of *The Serbian Society for Aesthetics of Architecture and Visual Arts* is for the first time presented to public by the thematic block prepared for SAJ.

The thematic block is the construct of the *virtual conference* within the context of which it is debated about the issues of contemporary aesthetics of architecture, visual arts and the humanities. The objective of the textual debates in SAJ theme is problemizing characteristic issue of contemporary architecture, contemporaneity, philosophy of architecture and art, philosophy of sports and critique art theory. The authors of the scientific debates come from diverse cultural contexts of contemporary global and transitional world: from Serbia (Mako, Dedić, Šuvaković), Slovenia (Erjavec, Kreft), Germany (Steiner) and Armenia/Lebanon (Harutyunyan). The authors of the texts speak for the issues of aesthetics of architecture (Mako), philosophy of architecture (Šuvaković), philosophy of sports and architecture (Kreft), aesthetics and philosophy of contemporary art (Erjavec), critique theorizing of space (Steiner), theorizing of interdisciplinary art studies and media studies (Dedić) and theory of contemporary art/architecture through the notion “Site-Writing”(Harutyunyan). In other terms, inter/transcultural and inert/trans-theoretical approaches have been offered as program platform for the future Society work.

# AESTHETICS IN ARCHITECTURE: CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ISSUES

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## A B S T R A C T

The aim of this article is to provide an overview regarding research into aesthetic issues concerning architecture, urban design, and environment in general. For this purpose, the article focuses on the period of the last twelve years, as a period of intensive research into the named issues using new philosophical positions and values of interculturality. It seems that in that period research in aesthetics of architecture shifted into complex interdisciplinary fields developing new theoretical ideas enriching at the same time processes of creative practice.

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## KEY WORDS

AESTHETICS  
ARCHITECTURE  
URBAN DESIGN  
ENVIRONMENT  
RESEARCH

Contemporary ideas on issues regarding aspects and principles of aesthetic thinking in/on architecture are mainly developing according to the theoretical, philosophical, and inter/cultural views of the last few decades of the twentieth century. The more interesting point is that these views liberated scholars from thinking on aesthetics in architecture based on the strict nominal values regarding principles of “gestalt” theory. Once being the primal field of investigation what creates the absolute universal concept of beauty in architecture, as the research in proper proportions, or in the theory of form in general and particularly suitable for various functions, or what makes the artistic concept forming a city, vanished. Even the issues regarding empathy and other concepts of creativity and aesthetic evaluation of this kind developed in the first half of the twentieth century, do not hold strongly in new discussions on architecture and our built environment.

This position shifted the interest of researchers and scholars into the field of experimentation and theoretical speculation, incorporating into discussion on architecture and urban design broader issues from a variety of different disciplines. A number of new notions regarding the aspects of creativity, perception, and evaluation of architectural and urban design and their social and cultural role emerged. The close collaboration between philosophers and architects in the last quarter of the twentieth century opened that possibility, and redefined many aspects and principles on which the discipline of building has been based. This pervasion of philosophy, architecture, and urban design brought up ideas and notions which the international modernism band from the theoretical exploration and practice. Many ideas and approaches to the essence of man’s perception of architecture as a complex environment, which have been developed by the avant-garde movements on the beginning of the twentieth century came back into the focus of the scholars and architects. We can say that dynamic of contemporary life turned back into the creativity of architects and urban designers, however sometimes in a way which challenge the essence of our previous understanding what these fields of human activity are.

This dynamic vision and practice of architecture and urban development generated new ideas and notions what the aesthetics linked to them can be. When Derrida and Baudrillard, for example, paid their attention on architecture and urban environment as a cultural phenomenon of the time, the definition of aesthetic aspects regarding their contemporary value shifted into the new speculative field. No more form defined by functional dictate, but anticipated dynamic activity of the user-participant; no more perceptual solidity of form

and cultural meaning, but the notion of aesthetics of disappearance and fluid perceptual qualities. That brought old issues into new focus, and the redefinition of aesthetic values in architecture and urban environment took over. From the 'perfectly' formed object, architecture become interpreted as a cultural performance with various functions and meanings; from the artistically formed whole, urban structure become a dynamic environment mirroring contemporary cultural, technological, and commercial activities. New aesthetic terms and vocabulary has been established, becoming a driving force of research in new phenomenon and understanding what the perception and experience of space and form, space and human body, new structuralism and disappearance of form can be.

Developed mainly on international aesthetic conferences, we can emphasize a few general topics regarding ideas on architecture and urban design. However, main approach to the investigation of issues in question is positioned according to the ideas of inter/multi/trans cultural existence and development of aesthetic phenomenon in architecture and urban design in the contemporary world. The general intellectual atmosphere in which the debates are holding is created in regard to the conscious idea that one should learn from different cultural experiences. Need for comparison of aesthetic ideas emerging from various cultural interpretations and experience values become a powerful driving force in the research of everyday transformation of contemporary societies. Globalization and regionalization are side by side processes influencing development of new aesthetic visions, values, and experiences, and that idea has been deeply rooted into contemporary research approaches and processes. In that context, a number of investigations are launched trying to research how historical cultural particularities reflect and influence contemporary understanding of architecture and urban design in their cultural and trans cultural complexity. Existence of possible universal values, cultural differences and similarities in the interpretation of aesthetic phenomenon and meanings, are researched according to the contemporary processes of social and political transformations as a global fact. In that sense, particular value proves the investigation of perceptual issues as the basis for every aesthetic experience, either as a pure physiological or cultural quality. It establishes the basis for a complex investigation of creativity as an aesthetic issue, particularly in the societies in the process of political, ideological, social and cultural transition, taking place in the last twenty years.

This process raises many issues and ideas trying to reevaluate ones, mostly ideologically, leading architectural and urban theories and practice.



Domination of social housing, for example, in the general development of socialistic societies and their urban environment, is under new research scope trying to establish sustainable cultural and aesthetic values according to the contemporary conditions of political and ideological transition in which the majority of European states are living today. Witnessing an enormous activity and structural transformation of earlier carefully planned urban structures, the research of this interdisciplinary phenomenon seems inevitable. It is evident that needs of contemporary life and economy takes over the earlier established idealistic approach to modern urbanism, not only by interpolation of new buildings into the free space of the 'garden city', but also changing the functional, social, and cultural matrix of huge parts of urban structures. However, the questions related to the aspects of aesthetic evaluation of this phenomenon, should be based on various new experience values, not only as perceptual but also as new social and cultural qualities.

Learning from the past becomes a particularly important issue, especially when regarding the inter/multi/trans cultural position of architecture and urban environment. The goal of researching traditional urban matrix and architectural structures is not any more just to reach knowledge important for the preservation of that cultural heritage. It is now the research into issues of sustainability, cultural and ecological, formed by the long lasting experience of people living under particular historical and natural conditions, mainly lost in the era off international modernism. Transition of that experience into contemporary society proves as a very important one, reflecting on new modes of self sufficient build environment. However, these investigations are opening new reflections on aesthetic issues, which become a driving force in development of contemporary ideas on architecture and urban environment.

One of the processes challenging conventional aesthetic values regarding architecture is related to the change of existing functions of buildings. It seems that in this field practice surpass the theoretical discussion and research into aesthetic principles of this process. However, the complexity of the issue, particularly if related to the aspects of cultural and technological sustainability, is an argument for deeper research into all social and aesthetic consequences of this phenomenon. This issue is particularly urgent when talking about the industrial building heritage and its technological facilities. Especially in the countries under political, economical, and social transition, this kind of heritage disappears fast. Being not substantially researched, the cultural significance and aesthetic potential of this building practice is not recognized, causing its degradation or demolition. Research into this issue

can also bring up new methodologies and approaches, aider in practice or education, which seems to be a substantially important field for contemporary architectural theory and aesthetics.

Contemporary aesthetics enters the field of creativity and epistemology in the search for the nature of aesthetic intention, as the foundation of every aesthetic activity. Complexity of this issue raises many questions regarding mainly the processes in forming concepts, leading to the final architectural and urban design appearance as a materialized cultural phenomenon. In that context, investigation in the field regarding the relationship between architectural creativity and education seems to be of interest, rising up questions looking on the process of conceptualizing ideas in a broader cultural context. The issues of interdisciplinary approach to the architectural education, the influence of other arts and design fields, of theories and fundamental perceptual and functional qualities, are recognized as the main factors in the process of defining the aesthetic intention, creative aspects, and concepts of design. They are at the same time tools for establishing the aspects of aesthetic evaluation, as the final step in the creative process. Awareness of such a structure of a creative process, can lead towards educational programs developing complex thinking and individual creative power, able to reflect on contemporary dynamic cultural environment.

Close to these issues, research into the relationship between architecture and consumerism and commercialism finds its important place. Not only that the research takes into the contemporary significance of these issues as an important part in the process of designing, but also as a manifestation of particular cultural value. It seems that consumerism and commercialism developed as a power controlling in some way the formation of aesthetic taste, respond, and needs of a majority in contemporary societies, becoming a strong force in the process of globalization. These issues are related to particular significance of contemporary media trough which ideas in architecture, art, and design are presented to the public, which brings them into the dynamic focus of the global information society. Does this process establish an global matrix of universal aesthetic values, or does it lead towards controlled everyday changeability of taste is still an open issue.

Only further research and discussion regarding the nature of aesthetic taste and how it forms in contemporary environment, can answer on questions related to the essence of creativity and its link to consumerism and commercialism. Can they help in generating values of high art or are they condemned to

be identified as developers of mass produced kitsch in our everyday urban environment, are questions waiting for discussion. Entering also the field of ethics and its essential role in the development of aesthetic ideas, this issue proves to be a highly complex one. That way it also contributes to the research efforts regarding general environmental issues.

Research undertaken in the last decade, proves the importance of the environmental aesthetic issues. This field of interest is extremely complex, and it integrates different sub fields ranging from the issues regarding natural environment, through the research in ecology and its relationship with aesthetics, to urban and cultural environmental ideas. It also involves ideas relating new technologies and sustainability in architecture and urban environment, aided on the global level and regarding cultural and climate particularities. Relationship between these issues and aesthetical and ethical concepts seems to be primal research field, looking on aesthetics as a new power generating ideas which can bring sustainable urban development into function. Aesthetics in this context can be thought as a main component in the search for sustainable solutions because through it one can establish balance between technologies as products of human industrial capacities, ecology as a necessary component if the humanity wishes to survive, and cultural environment, global and particular, as the generator of future developments of ideas.

This general context of investigation deals with a number of questions related to the issues discussing relationship between city and nature through their complex spatial, ecological, and cultural pervasions. The enormous development of cities creating urban environment with various, sometimes completely different concepts for each part of the same urban whole regarding their functional and historical particularities, brings up new issues and ways of interpretation of the essence of architecture, urban design, and nature. It also develops our understanding what the aesthetic can be when included into the process of a dynamic environmental development.

In this context, all aspects of contemporary commercialism, advertising and branding, find its place in our new experience of the city as a centre of economical power. However, it is not only the issue of relationship between architecture and new forms of public street advertising, often aggressive, which is in the focus of research into the perceptual phenomenon of merchant leading cities. There are different cultural issues and meanings regarding the multi/inter/trans cultural nature of contemporary megalopolis. The cultural exchange, particularly on the level of ordinary visitors to these cities, brings up

extremely important issues, how and in what way we perceive and aesthetically reacting on cultural differences on a large urban scale.

New methodologies are established researching the possibility of urban regeneration through direct involvement of art as a form of public performance. It brings back the essential meaning of public spaces as places where the political, cultural, and social performance occur, particularly in and after renaissance time. Importance of these approaches raises from the fact that public art performance as a social and cultural phenomenon generates new aesthetic values within everyday urban environment. Further research in this field will open discussion of its limits and possibilities in the process of urban development.

Indicated research issues are proving the importance of aesthetic ideas regarding architecture and urban environment in their further development. Research of aesthetic ideas, which are essentially related to the cultural existence of men, opens the possibility for revalorization of theoretical positions on issues regarding essential processes of architectural creativity, perception of our contemporary built environment, and their further development.

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# ART AND AESTHETICS: THREE RECENT PERSPECTIVES

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## A B S T R A C T

The author sketches the development of the relationship between art and aesthetics in the recent past. As his starting point, he takes the position that artists established in the sixties in relation to philosophical aesthetics. In his view 1980 represented a historical threshold as concerns transformations both in art and its philosophy. He then discusses three theories of art and aesthetics – Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" from the nineties, Jacques Rancière's aesthetic project from the following decade, and the very recent "theory of contemporary art" developed by Terry Smith. In author's opinion, these three aesthetic or art theories not only disprove the pervasive opinion that contemporary aesthetics understood as philosophy of art is once more separated from contemporary art and the art world, but also manifest their factual import and impact in contemporary discussions on art.

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## KEY WORDS

ART

AESTHETICS

RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

JACQUES RANCIÈRE

TERRY SMITH

CONTEMPORARY ART

## 1.

In a statement made famous, Barnett Newman exclaimed that “aesthetics is to the artist as ornithology is to the birds.” Since its enunciation around 1952 this claim has been reiterated on innumerable occasions. Its original addressee was Susan Langer and its intent was to denigrate attempts to introduce semiotics and linguistics into art criticism and aesthetics. It was often also interpreted as criticism of the beautiful on the part of Newman and his embracement of the sublime, although it was most frequently taken as a criticism of aesthetics as such. Nonetheless, such a situation was more typical of the United States or the United Kingdom and their “philosophical empire” (Richard Shusterman) than of continental philosophy, aesthetics included. In recent decades the Anglo-American “empire” also underwent a change not yet discernible in Newman’s statement: today “political, moral, and ethical judgments have come to fill the vacuum of aesthetic judgment in a way that was unthinkable forty years ago.”<sup>1</sup>

What happened in forty years? May we claim that artists no longer see aesthetics as something irrelevant, as Newman probably did? The answer is affirmative. Arthur C. Danto recalls that after 1964 philosophical books of the “austere and technical order” began “to be preempted by the artworld and made its own, it was as though some deep transformation in artistic consciousness had taken place. A wholly different relationship between philosophy and art ... now seemed to exist. It was almost as if philosophy were somehow now part of the artworld, ... whereas in 1964 philosophy stood outside that world and addressed it from across an alienating distance.”<sup>2</sup>

In spite of aesthetics and related theories finding – as Danto witnesses – a response and appreciation in art, this relationship remains uncertain: in the last three decades, i.e. since the cultural explosion of the late seventies and early eighties, when postmodern artistic practices and theories reigned, most aesthetic theories have once again left the path along which they had walked together with art. In the last two decades philosophy of art has apparently gone its own way, leaving contemporary artistic practices to rely on sporadic instances of art criticism or on rare philosophical theories that attempted to selectively grasp contemporary artistic phenomena. This had much to do with the current situation in art, bringing to mind the mentioned observation that “political, moral and ethical judgments have come to fill the vacuum of aesthetic judgment,” for has not the predominant recent and contemporary art really become politically, morally and ethically involved, frequently focusing on topics related to social, ethnic, political and other issues which make it

appear to be political and politicized – not in the sense of the twentieth-century master narratives but in the meaning of Michel Foucault’s “microphysics of power?” In other words, is it not true that art of today still strives, very much in the tradition of modernism, romanticism and the avant-gardes, to be provocative, critical, partisan, subversive and “involved?” It apparently continues to retain its objectives from modernity, even if most often without equivalent theoretical support.

To ascertain how the story – one of the possible stories – of some artistic, aesthetic and philosophical positions unfolded in the last two decades, I shall sketch some of the common preliminary circumstances and then some theories that detected and articulated them. I thus intend to revisit three theories which have influenced – and are still influencing – not only global views and opinions about contemporary aesthetics, but equally or more intensely views about art and culture, realizing this not in the sense of determining what is good or bad art, but what is to be considered art as such.

In the past four decades the big shifts from modernism and modernity to the present contemporaneity occurred. Today a term missing on this path from modernity to contemporaneity seems to be postmodernism. Nonetheless, in spite of frequent criticism, it should not be forgotten that postmodernism emerged as the great liberator from the suffocating modern totalizations and high modernism. In the words of Wolfgang Iser from 1988, “Postmodernity is traversed by the knowledge that totality cannot come without establishing as the absolute a certain particularity, which is then related to the destruction of other particularities.”<sup>3</sup>

Postmodernism in Europe emerged as a theoretical and practical novelty in the seventies. After a few years it was replaced by cautious and reluctant admissions of the factual emergence of the postmodern newcomer, complemented by celebratory praise for postmodernism as a new and liberating cultural paradigm. A critical attitude towards it nonetheless remained strong. The main claim against it was the incompleteness and therefore the still actual relevance of the project of modernity. This attitude was also witnessed by alternative or complementary reflective articulations – some still being with us – such as “parallel modernities,” “second modernity,” or, as in the case of China, that of “modernization.”

Such cultural issues have been connected to political issues in the sense that they were related to the end of ideologies, the clash of civilizations, the end of Marxism as the main master narrative of the previous century, the related



fall of revolutionary socialism and its industrialist ideological supports, the surprise at discovering limits to the neoliberal political and economic agenda, as well as the lack of viable political projects and ideas capable of replacing it or at least offering a sustainable alternative to it: is this to be a revival of the relevance of Marxism, communism and of the class struggle as recently argued by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, or spontaneous outbursts of social revolts of the multitude as conceptualized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and discussed by Paolo Virno, or something as yet unthought? And where does art stand in this?

How can we determine the cultural delineations of the last four decades and especially those related to aesthetics? A starting point can be the rise of postmodern ideas and postmodernism. The fascination with postmodernism and its incessant attempts at establishing its identity by demarcating itself from modernity perhaps revealed as much about modernity as about postmodernism. From the contemporary perspective it would appear that postmodernism was essentially a transient phenomenon, but at the same time one that represented a cultural marker of a deeper historical shift: from industrial society and national cultures and economies to the post-industrial and information society and, of course, to multinational capital and globalism.

In the early eighties one of the central theoretical issues was the question of the existence and nature of postmodernism as the most recent cultural dominant. The as yet undecided response to this query has almost prohibited a similar questioning in our current historical situation. In order to establish what some of the possible answers to this question may be, I will briefly discuss three theories that have captured the attention of audiences that may be broader or different from one of aestheticians. I will thus be discussing “relational aesthetics” as developed by Nicolas Bourriaud in the nineties, Jacques Rancière’s aesthetics from the past decade and Terry Smith’s theory of contemporary art developed mainly in the last few years.

Two of these authors, Bourriaud and Rancière, explicitly regard their theories as aesthetic ones. That of the former is an endeavor undertaken by a curator, editor and art critic, while Jacques Rancière is a philosopher. The third author, Terry Smith, is a historian of art and architecture (and known in the past mostly for his book *Making the Modern*, 1993). While hardly mentioning aesthetics, he nonetheless explicitly or implicitly discusses issues of essential relevance to contemporary philosophy and theory of art. It is worth noting that Smith employs an abundance of artistic examples to establish and persuasively support his views.

In all three cases the theories offered are mainly devoted to visual art, taking such kind of art as a privileged artistic domain. Only Rancière is to some extent an exception, for he also uses literature as an important point of reference. All three authors take into consideration contemporary or recent art, thereby offering their theories as theories that are to influence the philosophical and the theoretical communities as well as various art worlds. The authors of the three theories also discuss contemporary global art. For them there no longer exists a recognizable border between the art of the First, the Second and the Third Worlds; instead they see contemporary artists and art as progressively becoming inextricably linked and combined, making the demarcation between various parts of the globe impossible or irrelevant.

## 2.

If we say that a historical period which marks a transformation in relation to the past and to the future is a time of profound change, then the period in art and culture around 1980 was such a time. Its cultural dominant, postmodernism, was the last cultural paradigm that was essentially created and almost exclusively theorized within the European and American context.

Postmodernism, as a concept and empirical fact, emerged in the realm of architecture, by this very fact witnessing to a cultural stance irreverent as regards the previous dominant literary artistic and cultural paradigm. In 1977 British architect and critic Charles Jencks published a book entitled *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. The term “postmodern” immediately became a cultural catchword, for it conceptually crystallized in a single word a multitude of similar although unrelated cultural and social phenomena. As Jencks explained in a later edition of this book, “When I first wrote this book in 1975 and 1976 the word and concept of Post-Modernism had only been used, with any frequency, in literary criticism. Most perturbing, as I later realised, it had been used to mean ‘Ultra-Modern’, referring to the extremist novels of William Burroughs and a philosophy of nihilism and anti-convention. While I was aware of these writings, of Ihab Hassan and others, I used the term to mean the opposite of all this: the end of avant-garde extremism, the partial return to tradition and the central role of communicating with the public – and architecture is *the* public art.”<sup>24</sup>

The role of architecture as the birthplace of postmodernism was highlighted also in philosophy and cultural theory. Thus Jürgen Habermas begins his programmatic lecture/essay on “Modernity – An Incomplete Project” from 1980 by stating: “In 1980, architects were admitted to the Biennial in Venice,

following painters and filmmakers. The note sounded at this first Architecture Biennial was one of disappointment. I would describe it by saying that those that exhibited in Venice formed an avant-garde of reversed fronts. . . . A critic advanced a thesis whose significance reaches beyond this particular event; it is a diagnosis of our times: ‘Postmodernity definitely presents itself as Antimodernity’.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet another analysis of postmodern architecture was offered by Fredric Jameson, who claimed that “architecture . . . remains the privileged aesthetic language.”<sup>6</sup> Jameson also spoke of a “postmodern space”, relating it to the notion of the sublime in the sense that it defers a cognitive mapping.

In many ways architecture – often in the sense of “corporate postmodernism” – was the initial paradigm of postmodernism: it was, as Jencks acutely noticed, *the* public art, meaning that it was focused on the public and the users (and therefore the market); it was averse to avant-garde experimentation, it allowed or even cherished ornaments and embellishments, it furthermore demolished the barrier between the inside and the outside and promoted the aestheticization of our lived environment, which went hand in hand with the embellishment of the objects of our quotidian life and the aestheticization of the human body.

In this sense, postmodernism represented much of what was considered negative when viewed from within the tradition of critical theory and avant-gardes. While this view could be correct when regarded from a Western European or American viewpoint, it became questionable when regarded from Third or Second World perspectives: in Cuba, for example, the term postmodernism was avoided because of its associations with the U.S. In China it was understood in the sense of “modern”, while in the former European socialist countries its irreverent treatment of ruling ideas (cultural or political), its fondness for eclecticism and its “anything goes” approach made it a liberating social and cultural theory. Postmodernism was furthermore welcomed in small cultures, which have in the modernist past always practiced a cultural policy of appropriation and eclecticism. Suddenly their former cultural practice, which had until then been interpreted as a symptom of a lack of originality, of copying larger cultures and of being late-comers, was suddenly transformed into a marker of being active participants in the most recent cultural invention and trend.

In the eighties Zygmunt Bauman hypothesized that the essential characteristic of postmodernism was that it represented a point in history in which the question of the end of modernity could be posited and thought for the first

time – and that it was this possibility which represented the actual essence of postmodernism. In classical modernity, argued Bauman, nothing conceivable existed beyond it.<sup>7</sup>

Regarded from a contemporary perspective, such observation appears very true: postmodernism, postmodernity and their theories – be it those of Bauman, Jameson, Welsch, Lyotard or others – appear to exist today primarily as interrelated critiques of modernity and modernism and not as positing of alternative theoretical edifices that would or could subvert materializations of the enormous inventions of modern development. It also appears that while much of postmodern art is eclectic and offers meaning instead of the modernist truth, today at the same time it reveals something about its transcendental conditions and its historical and existential contexts; somehow it reveals truth where it seemed there was none to be searched for, only a pure or opaque surface. Often such truth is related to the postmodern acknowledging instances of otherness related to differences in subjectivity.

Postmodernism today resembles modernism and modernity. Even Fredric Jameson, probably the most influential postmodern author, is today seen as a modernist figure and theorist. Is not his recurring tripartite scheme a typical Hegelian triadic construction, with the postmodern cultural dominant possessing all the modernist prerogatives and postmodernism revealing the historical necessity of its ontological blindness as concerns its inner artistic nature and its obligatory nature of “not seeing” in the sense of not mapping its place in its here and now? Does not his theory, just as postmodernism itself, increasingly resemble a modified and critically transformed discourse of modernity?

### 3.

“Relational aesthetics” was a notion presented for the first time in 1996 and developed in Nicolas Bourriaud’s book of the same title published in French in 1998 and in English in 2002. Bourriaud, a French art critic, curator and editor, has also authored other books (the more recent *Postproduction*, for example). A concept related to Bourriaud’s, but one that never gained similar international attention, was “Context Kunst”, coined by the Austrian art critic and curator Peter Weibel and publicly presented at an exhibition by the same name in Graz, Austria, in 1993.

I should note that in my discussion of Bourriaud’s “relational aesthetics” I will be relying almost exclusively on the book by this title, for over time

Bourriaud's views changed and sometimes contradicted each other. Referring thus to a single work of his will facilitate our discussion of his basic tenets.

Bourriaud's book is consciously a work whose intention is to theoretically, perhaps even philosophically, reflect upon the art of its time, i.e. the nineties. In his view the art of his time is characterised by a pronounced establishment of relations and communication between the artist and the public. As the author states in the foreword to the book, the misunderstandings concerning the art of the nineties arose out of the lack of theoretical discourse. In his view, the majority of critics and philosophers were averse to tackling contemporary artistic practices, which thus mostly remained unreadable.

Bourriaud intended to compensate for this deficiency and develop a theory which would to some extent philosophically grasp and plausibly explain what he saw to be not only a temporary phenomenon – i.e. the art of the nineties, with “relational art” being the specificity that emerged in that decade – but an art that in his opinion possessed a more substantial historical significance. He claimed that today history “seems to have taken a new turn. After the area of relations between Humanity and deity, and then between Humankind and the object, artistic practice is now focused on the sphere of inter-human relations, as illustrated by artistic activities that have been in progress since the early 1990s.”<sup>8</sup>

Bourriaud thus proclaimed the art of the nineties to be the essential instance and materialization of relational art and thus also the privileged object of relational aesthetics, in this respect somehow repeating Hegel's thesis about the development of the self-consciousness of the mind but – similarly to Rancière's notion of the “aesthetic regime of art” – not positing a historical closure to its development. Bourriaud claimed that relationality was a universal feature of art, one that was opened up in art by the Italian renaissance, only that in that case art was not yet creating intersubjective relationships but those between art and the objects it depicted. By his tripartite historical scheme Bourriaud followed in the footsteps of other recent French theorists, such as Régis Debray (*Vie et mort de l'image*, 1991), and Jacques Rancière, who divided history into similarly conceived regimes, even if in Rancière the historical divisions between them were blurred. Rancière thus referred to the “ethical regime of images”, the “representative regime of art”, and the “aesthetic regime of art” that did not necessarily follow each other but could temporally overlap.

Bourriaud's “relational aesthetics” and his notion of “relational art” have been subjected to innumerable reviews and criticisms, and also served as

the basis for other critical discourses. In spite of many obvious fallacies and contradictions inherent to his book, the latter not only generated interest among theorists, but was also well received by artists, curators, critics and the so-called “art world” in general. It was the 2002 English publication of *Relational Aesthetics* that put the book on the global art map and turned it into an important point of reference for those with an interest not only in the most recent fine arts and new technologies (which were Bourriaud’s main points of reference), but also those involved with performance art and even theater. The success of Bourriaud’s book also confirmed his observation about the lack of theoretical discourse on the art of the nineties – a period when creative art was emerging not only from Western Europe and the United States, but also from the former Soviet bloc countries, with the latter being subjected to more developed theoretical reflection. The lack of critical theoretical response to the art of the nineties perhaps had something to do also with the still vibrant postmodern ideas and the thesis that the art of that time was only a chain of meaningless signifiers, not allowing for a cognitive mapping that could equal that of the class consciousness as theorized by György Lukács, artistically making itself visible in its co-temporal modernist manifestations. On the one hand, western artists were confronted with the politicized art coming from the former or present socialist countries, and on the other with the critical art of the neo-avant-garde tradition and its forms of resistance. Curators, furthermore, became the crucial artistic figures of the nineties, turning themselves into roles previously reserved for film or theatre directors and setting up their almost private exhibitions, establishing in this way the pronounced dominance of the curator who replaced the previous persona of the modernist art critic. Since the curator became the pivotal figure of the art world, it was not unexpected that he also attempted to articulate the theoretical positions which were to create, reflect upon and support the principles of his curatorial practices. Nicolas Bourriaud did just that and this fact became one of the sources of the impact his book made and continues to make in the world, be it the world of art or of academia.

In his book *The Century* (2005) Alain Badiou points out that the predominant part of the modernist art of the twentieth century did not appear in the form of a material work but in the form of an act, as some kind of performance. Boris Groys similarly claims – but in relation to contemporary art – that installation art and performance art are the authentic and the dominant art forms of our contemporaneity.<sup>9</sup> In this respect Bourriaud conforms to this view and confirms such observation.

Bourriaud has advocated performativity, social contexts, transitivity and dialogue over the limitations of traditional modernist values such as individualism and objecthood. Bourriaud finds empirical support for relational aesthetics in the art of the nineties, and theoretical support especially in Félix Guattari's philosophy. According to Guattari, it is illusory to aim at a step-by-step transformation of society. The only realistic options are microscopic attempts of the community and neighborhood committee type, such as the organization of day-nurseries in the faculty and the like, which play in his opinion an absolutely critical role.

If in any, then we are with Bourriaud in the inverted cosmos of Michel Foucault's microphysics of power, a cosmos in which – to use examples from Bourriaud – the artist Rirkit Tiravanija prepares a meal and invites visitors to share it with them, or “when Gabriel Orozco puts an orange on the stalls of a deserted Brazilian market, ... or slings a hammock in the MoMa garden in New York.”<sup>10</sup> According to Bourriaud, with such gestures the artist acts in the small space of everyday life that is determined by the superstructure, with this one consisting of and being determined by the “large” exchanges. In other words, what Bourriaud is promoting is an art that does not strive to be a part of modern utopias or that would want to resist current social antinomies (and therefore continue the avant-garde tradition of modernism), but one that is content to create “microtopias”. In Rancière's words, in Bourriaud “art no longer tries to respond to an excess of commodities and signs but rather to a lack of bonds. As [Bourriaud] puts it: ‘Through little services rendered, the artists fill in the cracks in the social bond’.”<sup>11</sup>

A related criticism is aimed at Bourriaud by Claire Bishop. In her view – which is less political than Rancière's and that I find to be among the most relevant and pertinent – the main problem with Bourriaud's theory and the artistic examples he chooses is that he promotes art that requires “a unified subject as a prerequisite for community-as-togetherness”, instead of basing relationality on (or also on) the art of the same period that provides experiences “more adequate to the divided and incomplete subject of today.”<sup>12</sup>

Bourriaud's work shows that in spite of being frequently contradictory – as when he embraces modernity and the criticality of various modes of modernist art, while at the same time opting for cosy and intimate non-conflictual community-building and sharing experiences as art – personal choice, even if one-sided, has enormous effects in society and in art. In spite of its weak

points, Bourriaud's relational aesthetics had a strong impact on contemporary art criticism. Bourriaud justly pointed out that one of the essential features of art – any art – is and remains the establishment of communication and interpersonal exchange.

#### 4.

In the preface to *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault raises an issue on which this work of his is based: "Between the already 'encoded' eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself . . . . In every culture, between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and of its modes of being."<sup>13</sup>

This passage from Foucault can help us shed light on a large segment of Jacques Rancière's philosophical and aesthetic project which started in recent years to have a visible global impact not only among philosophers but also among contemporary artists and art critics.

As Rancière explains in a 2002 interview, "something of Foucault's archaeological project – the will to think the conditions of possibility of such and such a form of statement or such and such an object's constitution – has stuck with me."<sup>14</sup> What is relevant for Rancière in Foucault and what recalls Kant's transcendental philosophy is precisely his interpretation of the constitution of aesthetics, of the way aesthetics as a concept became possible, thereby aiding in the development of a general notion of art. His aesthetic project consists of nothing less than a thorough overhaul of the current dominant theory of modernism and autonomous art.

Rancière – a former student of Louis Althusser and involved in his *Lire le Capital* book project who later, like Alain Badiou, dissociated himself from Althusser – published works on pedagogy and on political philosophy, to become in the last decade known also outside the Francophone world and to become at the moment probably the most influential continental philosopher pursuing "aesthetics." In his view – described, often repeated and somewhat developed in a series of thin volumes, conference papers and interviews which in his words "allow him to say as much as possible in as little space as possible"<sup>15</sup> – Rancière persistently repeats a few main tenets of his philosophy of the aesthetic. These are some of the central ones:



Aesthetics is a discourse born two centuries ago and is the condition of possibility for thinking art in general. “It was in this same era that art, in its indeterminate singularity, was first set in contrast to the list of fine, or liberal, arts.”<sup>16</sup> “For art to exist what is required is a specific gaze and form of thought to identify it.”<sup>17</sup> A specific gaze is the gaze of the aesthetic regime of art. But without having aesthetics as its transcendental condition, art would not attain the singular generalized mode which has allowed us for two centuries to speak about art as well as to pose questions about its nature and its universal properties. In this way aesthetics has carried out a “distribution of the sensible,” that is, it developed the notion of art – and thus the whole field of art – in a specific way, including some and excluding some other forms of production and creativity. What Rancière is after are conditions that make possible categories such as art, critical art, autonomous art, etc. The aesthetic regime of art which, he argues, came into existence more or less simultaneously with aesthetics, has essentially replaced the representative regime of art which was erected upon the verisimilitude of the representation and the represented. The aesthetic regime purportedly rejected such a hierarchical system, allowing for osmosis among elite and abstract art and arts and crafts, thereby bringing together under the same roof the abstractions of Malevich and the Bauhaus projects or Stendhal and the Arts and Crafts movement.

Rancière attempted to turn aesthetics into a tool of interpretation of contemporary art by proclaiming modernism – especially of the Greenbergian type – obsolete and counter-productive for an analysis of the art of the last two centuries. In his view, the notion of modernism (a part of which he calls “modernitarism”) raises all kinds of problems, such as the division of art into formalism and politicized avant-gardism or the lumping together of theories as diverse as those of Adorno and futurism.

In spite of some persuasive arguments, Rancière’s attack on modernism seems problematic and risky especially because it requires a complete reinterpretation of the art of the last two centuries. Rancière claims that art is like democratic politics: the persons who are without a voice in a community have to attain a voice, have to fight for the right to speak and to be heard. The same is true of Rancière’s theory. A question also arises as to the delimitation of art and crafts in the aesthetic regime. Today nobody defends the “pure” art that Rancière chastises and we all agree with him that modern art is a mechanical mixture of artistic (formal) and extra-artistic (heteronomous) elements.

According to Rancière then, there exist three regimes or modes of art, with the “aesthetic regime” being the one instituted by the aesthetic revolution at the end of the eighteenth century when works were proclaimed art without possessing the representational properties which previously purportedly distinguished art from non-art.

Since then, and Rancière is quite adamant about this, the aesthetic regime of art stretches on into contemporaneity, disregarding issues such as the autonomy of art or the modernism/postmodernism dilemma, the theory of the end of art or that of the purity of art. All these, claims Rancière, are issues created by the false supposition that modernism is a concept rooted in historical reality and not simply an ideological notion created *post festum*.

5.

In his *Aesthetic Theory* Theodor Adorno claims that “the principle of method here is that light should be cast on all art from the vantage point of the most recent artworks, rather than the reverse.”<sup>18</sup>

In both authors so far discussed it is obvious that their starting point is contemporaneity, although in Rancière’s case this contemporaneity paradoxically runs through an ahistorical and synchronic continuum within which only the starting point – around 1800 – is explicitly noted, which then stretches into an undefined contemporaneity.

Terry Smith’s theoretical endeavor warrants attention for he tackles the issue of contemporary art head-on. Like Bourriaud, Smith also approaches the art of his time, only his time is currently also ours and he does not ascribe historic proportions to the current epoch as Bourriaud did. Also, if the art discussed by Bourriaud included recent non-European and non-American art, such art was nonetheless mostly the creation of artists who permanently emigrated to Europe and the U.S. from other continents. In Smith’s case the art presented is more locally defined and determined, or it is explicitly “global”.

Smith’s project – presented especially in his 2009 book *What is Contemporary Art?* but also in his other publications – consists of an attempt to untangle the incessantly loose ends of contemporary art and to establish some common points and features in what appears to be a jumble of contradictory, excluding or parallel works and events that apparently share only the title of “art,” which they appropriate by being presented within an environment that is designated

as that of a museum, a gallery, a biennial or some other artistic space/place/location. Their shared characteristics often have nothing to do with their shared locality but with their common, related or similar concepts. Also, if in the past, as Zygmunt Bauman claimed in 1989, philosophers were “legislators” – think, for example, of Hegel’s cannonic role in determining our perception of past art – then they turned in recent decades into “interpreters”. Today even this role of interpreters has lost its significance, for the number of art worlds has become infinite. It is such a situation that makes Smith claim that universalisms such as modernity or postmodernity will not achieve totality, nor allow for a sustainable compromise.

Smith’s main position concerning contemporaneity could be condensed into the following statement: “*Contemporaneity consists precisely in the acceleration, ubiquity and constancy of radical disjunctures of perception, of mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them.*”<sup>19</sup>

Smith argues that in contemporary art a pattern exists between universal determination and random plurality. The pattern of which Smith speaks reminds one of the set theory that Alain Badiou posits in his main work, *Being and Event* (1988), as his ontology. The important feature of Smith’s theory is that it limits the import of common features to a pattern which is based on resemblance and not on a causal relationship.

According to Smith, contemporary art consists of three main currents which form the mentioned pattern: the first is institutionalized Contemporary Art (which amounts to an aesthetic of globalization and is related to neoliberal economics and art institutions), the second is a current that emerges from decolonization within the former colonial worlds and includes its impacts in the former First World. It is within this current that postmodernism is to be included as a segment thereof. In Smith’s view, “postmodernism” is a term too thin to denote this great change that is still continuing. He argues that postmodernism is today but a pointer to the first phase of contemporaneity.

The outcome of Smith’s theory of contemporary art is that there exist not one but three complementary answers to the question of what is contemporary art. There exist then three interrelated kinds of contemporary art, the essence of which is raised on empirical grounds but which nonetheless possess some

broader philosophical characteristics. Such interpretation of contemporaneity and its art have often met with criticism and denigration – as at a conference in 2004 which resulted in the collective volume *Antinomies of Art and Culture. Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (2009) where some participants flatly refused to accept Smith's claims about contemporary art.

Art is contemporary in an infinite number of ways, insists Smith, offering again a statement very similar to Alain Badiou's argument about set theory, where there is no all-encompassing mathematical set. In Badiou this truth carries universal proportions, that is, it is not only historically or geographically valid, but is instead, like Kant's epistemology, valid universally. Because contemporary art is not only globally created and exhibited but also globally conceptualized, it is also universal.

6.

In this brief sketch I have pointed to some of the encounters of aesthetics and art in recent decades. They witness that in spite of numerous examples proving the opposite, art and aesthetics occasionally become or remain partners in our attempts to fathom, identify, legitimize and appreciate art.

What occurred within and after postmodernism was a series of individual poetics and expressions. This development was detected, presented and analyzed also by some contemporary aesthetic and art theories. I have noted three. The first represents a reflection upon a segment of the art of the nineties. It offers a theory in a situation when there was obviously none available. The second theory represents an attempt at a thorough overhaul of the ruling discourse on modernity and modernism, collapsing modern past and present art into the aesthetic regime of art. The third theory, that of Terry Smith, offers at the moment a starting point, since for the time being it remains in an underdeveloped state. It promises to think the contemporaneity of contemporary art anew, which is a much needed endeavor. Let me therefore conclude this essay with two propositions by Smith: One: "Art everywhere today is contemporary in every sense." Two: "Today art is still modern, in part, but residually so. It sees postmodernism as a recent repository of useful strategies that do not, however, add up to a whole."<sup>20</sup>

I would subscribe to both statements. It remains to be seen whether this theory of contemporary art will acquire a significance that will reach beyond the needs stemming from the ambiguity whether today we should refer to the museum

of modern or contemporary art – or perhaps both. We know what theories are behind the notion of modern art, but which theories are to philosophically support the notion of the museum of contemporary art?

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NOTES

- 1 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004): 77.
- 2 Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), x.
- 3 Wolfgang Iser, "Modernité et postmodernité," *Les Cahiers de Philosophie* 6 (1988): 25.
- 4 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1987), 6.
- 5 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 3-15.
- 6 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 37.
- 7 Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).
- 8 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. S. Pleasance & F. Woods (Monts: Les presses du réel, 2002), 28.
- 9 Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2008).
- 10 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 17.
- 11 Jacques Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics. An interview," trans. F. Morlock, *Angelaki* 8 (2) (2003): 57.

- 12 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 79.  
 13 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage  
 Books, 1994), xxi.  
 14 Jacques Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics. An interview," 209.  
 15 Ibid., 209.  
 16 Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. S. Corcoran, (Cambridge: Polity Press,  
 2009), 6.  
 17 Ibid.  
 18 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of  
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# ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

## RELATIONS, POTENTIALITIES AND

## CRITICAL POINTS

### A B S T R A C T

In the debate “Architecture and Philosophy / the relations, potentialities and critical points” the notions of “philosophy of architecture” and “aesthetics of architecture” will be discussed. The differences between traditional and contemporary philosophy and aesthetics of architecture will be introduced. In a separate sub-chapter the status of “theory” and “theorizing” during the times of late modernism and postmodern culture will be discussed. It has been pointed to the modalities of theory outside philosophy and aesthetics. The discourses from philosophy, humanities, free theorizing and architectural theories are brought closer together. In the final sub-chapter the status of contemporary philosophy and cotemporary architecture have been discussed. The notion of contemporaneity has been particularly elaborated. The central thesis of this paper is the relation of architecture and philosophy, i.e. the theory constituent for modern, postmodern and contemporary architecture. The derived thesis of the discussion is that critical theory of architecture and *architectural yearning* for “critical architecture” have acquired exceptional significance at the time of global conflicts and, presently at the time of global economic crisis. The theoretical, aesthetic and philosophical attention has essentially been shifted from the immanent questions about architecture (form, function, spectacularity) to the external i.e. transcendental questions about the culture and society, i.e. about the economy, power, governance, supervision, forms of life, flexibility of architectural production, exchange and consumption.

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### KEY WORDS

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## ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY: PLATFORMS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The issues of relations of philosophy and architecture are the issues of deducing the views and of taking the individual view opposite to the general opinion. Deducing and taking the views are the forms of philosophical production. Philosophical production is carried out according to protocols, in procedures and with the effects of views, speech and writing on architecture, namely, on the relations of architecture and philosophy as special and as general knowledge. Philosophical production of views on architecture is most often deduced within the context of philosophy (with the interests of philosophy as a discipline), then, in the context of architecture (with the interests of architecture as a discipline), namely, within the field of the humanities (with the interests of the humanities trans-disciplinary knowledge).

In the western tradition the difference between aesthetics and philosophy of architecture was made and emphasized during the nineteenth century and until the middle of the twentieth century. The philosophy of architecture in the traditional sense was understood as a view which within itself developed the reflection and self-reflection of architecture as separate and general philosophical issue. From diverse philosophical platforms there developed the philosophical reflections of view on the phenomenon of architecture or the phenomenon of the architectural work, on the history of architecture, on economic and political sense of architecture, on the knowledge in architecture or on general conceptions of architectural knowledge, on the language of architecture or semiological analysis of architecture, on architecture as trade, etc. These have been established from the philosophical platforms: epistemology of architecture, semiology of architecture, phenomenology of architecture, Marxist philosophy of architecture, analytical philosophy of architecture, deconstruction of architecture, philosophy of the history of architecture, etc. Opposite to the philosophy of architecture, the aesthetics of architecture in the traditional sense was seen as a philosophical discipline dealing with analysis, interpretation and judging of architectural works in their sensorial modes. Aesthetics of architecture has been understood as a meta-theory of the “theory of architecture”, or more often, as a meta-theory of architectural knowledge of forming the architectural work. In other terms, aesthetics was seen as the meta-theory of architectural theory of forms in a synchronous and diachronic sense.

However, presently, no difference has been made between the notions of “philosophy of architecture” and “aesthetics of architecture”. Philosophy

and aesthetics of architecture are conceptual and discursive analyses, interpretations, studies or discussions of the general notion or general notions of architecture as contemporary and historical discipline. Thereby, also the protocols of the humanities have been integrated into the field of aesthetics/philosophy of architecture which leads to the characteristic hybridizing of the theoretical potential of contemporary philosophy/aesthetics of architecture.

Let us move to another issue.

How can one understand the view of architecture? The answers are numerous and diverse. The view can be understood as something which is inseparable from the body which thinks, namely, as a body which deduces the view in respect to architecture. The view can be understood as *that which* fills up the body transforming it into the *human Self* (individuum, subject, The Self) in respect to architecture (architectural product, creation within architecture or inhabiting and reception of architecture). The view is recognized, i.e. modeled, as processing, articulation, offer of or deriving of “mental representations” typical of the cognitive order of human mind which is orientated towards something beyond itself, i.e. towards architecture. The view is defined as a certain and uncertain processing of information which leads to acquiring some convictions and beliefs of architecture or anything else associated with architecture. The view can be understood also as that which is other than body, but which together with body forms one actual and potential “Self” of manifestation and action in the real and fictional worlds of architecture as human issue. Thereby, the view can be an understanding, namely bringing the views into relation with other views, speech, writing or media presentation of architecture as concrete or ideal object. Thus, the view is identified as a material social practice. Yet, the view can be understood also as *that which* (*Tell Quel*) is above or over the body which in sensuality is placed into brackets so as that which is termed the view can be represented as *only the view* in respect to the abstracted initial referential object i.e. in respect to architecture. Each of the potential descriptions of the relation of *the body and the view* is based on deduction of the individual *narrative* on that which could be the view as *practicing* the philosophy of architecture. Nadežda Čačinović, the philosopher and aesthetician, points out to the role of “narrative” (giving an account of) as the *tool* by means of which, against all facts, the effect of credibility can be achieved:

In a certain sense the entire human culture consists of the dilemma between the effect of the story and distrust of it.<sup>1</sup>

That is why, still, the philosophy of architecture can be talked about as deduction of reliable and unreliable narratives on the view which references the architecture, and not as the view itself or the relations of the view and the body. Presently, almost the general position is that narrative is what constitutes philosophy and that Socrates subject in philosophy is reached via Plato's narrative, never vice versa. It is believed that philosophy ensues from narrative. The *appearance* of philosophy is a matter of narrative choices, it is not the matter of philosophy determining narratives, but that the protocol narratives form the philosophy of architecture. When the British philosopher and critic of architecture, Benjamin Andrew<sup>2</sup> subjects to the analysis the notion "Khora" placed in Plato's dialogue "Timaeus" in relation with deconstruivist debate of architecture potentiality of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, he faces himself and us as readers with the philosophical narrative and its potential boundaries essential for postmodern architecture. It concerns the protocols and narratives in mutual confrontation. By confrontation of protocols and narratives the philosophical subjectivization takes place, i.e. the notional appearance of Benjamin, Derrida or architect Peter Eisenman. Still further on, *such and such* Plato, Derrida, Benjamin and Eisenman, who we refer to at some point, is just one of the choices from the *deposit of meaning*: from one complex archeological projection which seems more like a tangle of discourses or archive of texts than an arranged concept of the historical situating of the Self event. That is why for philosophy the *philosopher Plato* or *the Architect Eisenman* are not presented as a "being", but as a discursive *figure* originated by grouping different discourses in the field of philosophy and the field of architecture. They emerge in the disturbing and hybrid *languages* and, certainly, in the events of protocol, procedures and effects which provide their oneness of the subject of philosophy and the subject of architecture, i.e. the intrinsic and essential illusion of their completeness and integration in philosophical, architectural, cultural, historical and social reality is provided.

#### ARCHITECTURE IN THE TIME OF THEORY: THEORY OUTSIDE PHILOSOPHY

*The Time of theory* is termed the period following the crisis of high modernism of the 1960s, namely the period of decentering and deconstruction of modern metalanguages<sup>3</sup> of the society, politics, culture, technics, art and architecture. The time of theory begins with domination from the outside the interior crisis of philosophy and aesthetics reached in modern phenomenology and existentialism. Opposite philosophy, as the integrative system theory of views, the non-systematic theoretical practices of writing and deriving theorizing

inside special social and cultural areas of action were put in place. It concerns the experimental practices of literature (the magazine *Tel Quel*, language poetry), it concerns the science and theory on literature (the Yale School, Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette), it concerns the theory and practice of painting and visual arts (*Support Surface* group, *Art&Language* group), it concerns the film theory (the French theory and Anglo-American film study: the magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the magazine *Screen*), it concerns the theory of gender identities (theory of gender, female studies, gay studies, lesbian studies, queer studies: Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler), it concerns the theory of architecture (Bernard Tschumi, Peter Eisenman), etc. The theory, then, is no longer the external meta-orientated approach to interpretation of art and culture, but the fragmentary contextualization of the knowledge within the paradigms of culture and art. Such understanding of theory develops in the heterogeneous area of theoretical productions of poststructuralism since the late 1960s until the end of the twentieth century.

The “architecture in the time of theory” syntagm points out to the debate on the role and functions of theory, i.e. theoretical identifications in creation, making, production, exchange and consumption of architecture, i.e. in designing and execution of the form of life. Poststructuralistic theories as well as the contemporary philosophy with variants and hybridized orientations towards the theory of media, theory of body, theory of identity, theory of view, aesthetics of pragmatism, hermeneutics of reading, psychoanalysis of subjectivization, technothory, the new philosophical phenomenology, cultural theories or philosophical biopolitics, create the turn from interpreting architecture as empirically central issue of aesthetic-formal-utilitarian-technical execution of the living space, i.e. the form of life. According to these new heterogeneous approaches architecture was most often interpreted as a complex multimedia material textual event. It is multimedia since it is perceived not only as a passive space of habitation, but as heterogeneous ideological instrument of constituting of interactive, living and communicational social moment and social reality. Architecture is material, not only by that how the construction building material is shaped, but primarily by being a determined social practice of planning, execution and building of social reality. Architecture is textual since it is structured as a system of signs in complex communication and existential events of forming the human life. It is textual in that sense in which the text is the mode of production of visual, verbal, behavioral, spatial, screen and object meanings. It is an event as the multimedia textual manifestation of architecture occurs in time intervals of constitution of the individual and collective everyday life.

Architecture is not an aesthetic and aesthetical ideality derived analogously to the concept of autonomous modern work of art. Architecture is an instrument and effect of instrumentalization of constituting the plural (according to Jean-Louis Lyotard), ideologically determinable reality between political censures and unconscious (according to Louis Althusser). Architecture is an event of specific critical social practices (theory of signifying practice according to Julia Kristeva) and positioning of the subject in the field of differentiation of subjectivity and rationality (psychoanalytical theories in Jacques Lacan tradition). Architecture is a *material symptom* of constituting the social and political (according to Frederic Jameson<sup>4</sup>, Martin Jay, Slavoj Žižek, Boris Groys), sexual (diverse Freudian and Lacanian traditions, cultural studies), customary (theorizations of archeology of knowledge according to Michel Foucault), technological (according to Jean Baudrillard, Pol Virillio, Félix Guattari) or artistic (according to Victor Burgin) discourse. Architecture is also a polygonal of establishing relative cultural positions between civilization centers and margins (from Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics to postcolonial critique studies by Edward Said).

Postmodern theories of architecture<sup>5</sup> appear as opening up of post-structuralistic approaches within the social frame identifying themselves as post-historical and postmetalinguistic ones. That means that the interpretation of architecture is not derived in respect to continuous and orientated history of modernity development. Charles Jencks writes on the death of modern architecture.<sup>6</sup> Interpretation of architecture is derived in relation to various and inconsistent historical and geographical architectural and artistic traces which become referential ones, both for the postmodern architect (Aldo Rossi, Robert Venturi, John Hejduk, Bernard Tschumi, Peter Eisenman, Charles A. Jencks, Frank O. Gehry) and for the theoretician traversing across the phenomenal or textual presentations of architecture in the field of cultural analysis (Georges Bataille, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze<sup>7</sup>, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Pol Virillio, Frederic Jameson). Postmodern theory of architecture (Charles Jencks) primarily deals with the soft, weak or tangential, and that means multi-meaningful and decentered recognition and poetical suggestion of eclectic cited and collage interpretation of relative contextualization (Aldo Rossi) and decontextualizations (Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind) of the architectural work in the post-historical, information/media or globalizing society in which paradoxically there are confronted the regions, multicultural, international and nomadic samples (Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman<sup>8</sup>, Bernard Tschumi<sup>9</sup>). Theoretical interpretation is nomadic, meaning that

it manifests itself in the permanent relocation or delaying (*différance*) of the standpoints/points of view of architectural production and theoretical interpretation. Thereby, the theoretical interpretation is not a great meta language of the syntheses of the new building canons, such like it was with the architects-theoreticians of the modern (Gropius, Le Corbusier, Wright). On the contrary, it concerns the multitude of the transitory, floating and transient discourses which simultaneously interpret the questions on architecture and create the atmosphere of architecture in postmodern technology time.

Architecture in cultural studies<sup>10</sup> presents a significant sample for studying, interpretation and production of the possibility of demonstration of micro-social and everyday executions, functions and effects of production of the living space in the global postindustrial and post-block world. Cultural studies move from macro sociological studies of architecture as social and historical phenomenon of hegemonous western civilization to the questions on microstructures and micro constructions of cultural identities (geographic, racial, ethnic, regional, class, religious, gender<sup>11</sup>, generation one, etc). With the discussion of the context of architecture, from the room micro cell to macro geopolitical urbanism, one comes to problematizing how in a specific artificial space diverse cultural identities are constituted, reflected or presented. For example, how ethnical or professionally status, namely gender individual and micro collective identities are executed/derived in respect to the private or public architectural space. Also, cultural studies problematize the conditions of transfer of geographical architectural identities from one culture into another. Cultural studies are groups of theories having an interpretative academic function, however, also a poetical function in architectural creation, as well as the function of the actual globalizing politics.

Techno-cultural<sup>12</sup> theories start from the global transformation of the contemporary world by electronic or, metaphorically speaking, digital processing, structure and execution/deriving of the new artificial techno-world. The new artificial techno-world is not a designed metaphor of the future society and its architecture, but the actuality itself in which the modern man lives and acts. That world is the world which by means of aids (machines, instruments, prostheses) transcends from the phase of natural resources processing into the finished products and, thereafter, from the phase of production, distribution, exchange and consummation of information to the built world of modifications of the human being, to the *being* who is in *feed-back* relations with the technological system. In techno theories the basic ideas are postulated that the natural world is also the human media structure or, at least, articulation.

Architecture is no longer interpreted as the set of produced objects, but as a system of machines which realize the actual and visual existential reality of the human body which becomes cybernetically integrated into the living space (Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard, Pol Virillio). The questions are asked about the *cyborg*, the *Virtual Reality*, complex electronic-architectural prostheses by mean of which the human body becomes extended in spatial-time possibilities of existence. As if the techno-theory is demonstrating how the historical architecture has become the material for software simulation of the real and fictional space of existence.<sup>13</sup>

#### CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE AS PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL ISSUE

*Contemporary architecture* is most often the term for the actual architecture, i.e. the architecture which accentuates its contemporaneity. Contemporary architecture “happens” now or in the entirely immediate past.

The “contemporary architecture” concept, essential for the developed modernism immediately following the World War II, is based on interpretations characteristic for highly modernistic criticism, art history and history of architecture. The notion contemporary architecture has been introduced since the differences have been sensed among (1) formations of modernism at the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century (secession), (2) the emergence of modernism at the middle of the first half of the twentieth century (avant-garde and modernism of Bauhaus, De Stijl, Russian constructivism, Le Corbusier), and (3) practices of modernism at mid twentieth century (from the International style towards the high and late modernism). These historical differences, namely, different historical formations were supposed to be indexed and redefined at a certain moment, namely separated from the consistent and single-gender modern architecture concept into heterogeneous concepts referenced by the formations of modern, modernism, high modernism, late modernism, and eventually, contemporary art.

The so-called *postmodern turn* at mid-1970s and during the 1980s was based on the idolized interpretative models of “the end of history”, “end of modern society”<sup>14</sup>, “the end of art”<sup>15</sup> and establishing of “post-history”<sup>16</sup>, i.e. abolishing the historical understanding of art and architecture by stressing the archival presentation of the past in the present time architectural building. The time line of changes (of the development, revolution) of the modern and modernist architecture has been projected in the *spatial order* of archives which can be



indexed and mapped. *The historical logics* of modernism was replaced in postmodern by *the logics of archives*<sup>17</sup>, which is presentable as bureaucratically controlled and monitored map which represents, i.e. advocates for different diachronic manifestations in synchrony. In other terms, as if the entire infinitely complex and hybridized past was projected as “the architectural and urban trace” in the contemporaneity where it was arbitrarily “mixed up” or “confused” with the projections of the actual geographic architectural and urban cultures. That blend of the past and contemporary has determined the destiny of the postmodern theorizing of architecture of “post-history” as the necessary reckoning with the modernist historicism and aspirations towards fulfillment of the meaning and function of the history of modern architecture. The reckoning with architectural modernism was not seen as *criticism*, but as *deconstruction* of modernism as a form of historicism, i.e. as deconstruction of the *project of modernity* which appeared as a meaningful and target orientated sequence of movements, schools, manifestations or individual effects in development of modern architectural idealism. In other words, with postmodern theories the deconstructions of “historical development logics” of modernism were derived, although the postmodern architects, artists and theoreticians were extremely fascinated by history. However, for them history was a “trace” or a multitude of *floating* traces. They dealt with interpretations of arbitrary, dislocated and thereby enticing compounds (pastiche and bricolage) of the history traces and the traces of actuality in which it is possible to link everything again, recombine and multiply. Jacques Derrida in a rhetorically emphasized manner pointed out to the significance of the concept of “dislocation” and “trace”. According to Derrida, *dislocation*<sup>18</sup> is an event which occurs when something (trace) is forced out of its place (*locus*) and ceases to be considered an identified place, as added, in space (geography) and time (history).

The attention of the historians, critics and theoreticians of architecture, art and culture was shifted during the 1990s from the “history of immediate past” to interpretation of contemporary architecture, contemporary art and contemporary culture. It was as if the identifiable and determinable *world of architecture* was expanded into most open and most indefinite movements within synchronous cultures and social formations, namely, as if the cultural and social formations took over the potentiality of the “cultural politics” transforming architecture into one of many cultural practices of making, production, exchange and consumption. The contemporaneity has surpassed the questions on historicity focusing the role of the “contemporary” as the expression or effect, namely the affect of contemporaneity. Instead of historical presentation of the prospective of the contemporary architecture the prospective of “centered and fetishized



contemporaneity“ have been introduced – the contemporaneity of architecture as demonstrated, appropriated or modified testimony on “now” and “here”.

Being focused on “contemporaneity” has been shown by various theoreticians in their interpretations of “contemporary art”, let us for example consider the interpretations derived by Terry Smith, the leftist liberal theoretician and historian of contemporaneity:

In the aftermath of modernity, and the passing of postmodern, how are we to know and show what is it to live in the conditions of contemporaneity? This is a question about individual being and social belonging now, about how the relationship between them might be understood these days, and how they might be represented to others – in speech, in texts, in works of art, and in exhibitions.<sup>19</sup>

If these Smith’s ideas on “contemporary art” are applied to architecture it can be stated that the notion “contemporary architecture” is used as the marking for architecture at the time of globalism, transition and economic crisis at the beginning of the new century. It concerns the architectural situation following modernism and following postmodernism. The basic philosophical question is what the substantial conditions of contemporaneity are, in which way contemporaneity can be interpreted in a critique text, in architectural work or architectural discourses. Modernity and modernism were articulate by rejecting the tradition and deriving the universal actuality, as well as by utopian projection of the immediate ideal or concrete future. In actual theories of “contemporary art” the synchronous moment or interval *here and now* is historically theorized. In contemporaneity the modern – for example, Hegel’s and Marxist – causative historicism are rejected as the summary of concepts on progressive movement and development of humankind, spirit and society and thereby architecture as well. Postmodernist post-historicism and post-historicism as relation towards the past are rejected as well. Contemporaneity is centered and fetishized in relation to the individual and collective self-conscience on its time of culture, technology, architecture and art. Contemporary architecture no longer has the relation towards history and history of architecture, but towards cultural contexts and geographical situations i.e. geopolitical topos of location and dislocation. See the works of contemporary architecture which annul the historical modalities and accentuate the dialogue bit also the conflict with the local geographical, urban, political and cultural milieu: Frank O. Gehry *Guggenheim’s Museum in Bilbao* (1991-1997), Daniel Libeskind *The Jewish Museum in Berlin* (1988-1999), Norman Foster *City Hall* in London (1998-2002), Steven Holl *Kiasma Museum* in Helsinki (1993-1998), Rem Koolhaas *China CCTV Building* in Beijing (1999-2005), etc.

The cultural and architectural exchanges between the first post-capitalist, second post-socialist and transitional, also the third post-colonial worlds are discussed. Contemporary theorizing of “contemporary architecture” has moved from the concepts of history of architecture, supported by aesthetic and poetic discourses, to the concepts of cultural studies and, thereafter, to diverse critical approaches to the political studies. Critic theory of architecture and *architectural yearning* for “critic architecture”<sup>20</sup> have acquired an exceptional importance at the time of global conflicts and, nowadays, at the time of global economic crisis.<sup>21</sup> Theoretical, aesthetic and philosophical attention has essentially been shifted from the immanent questions on architecture (form, function, spectacularity) to the *external* i.e. transcendental questions about culture and society, i.e. about economics, power, governance, supervision, identity, flexibility of architectural production, exchange and consumption.

In such context architecture and culture are perceived as *transitional liberal practices* which at the global plan create the situation of the immenseness of phenomena, events, themes, referential potentialities and relations toward the local and global everyday life. At the theoretical plan there happened the switch from history of architecture as an essential theory of architecture to the cultural studies of architecture and art as essential cultural theories, and thereafter followed the switch to the theory of society. These switches were determined by annulling the diachronic in the name of synchronous, namely, from the works it was moved to the text, and from the text to the context, and from the context to the practice being the field of social contradictions and conflicts.

With global economic crisis at the end of the first and beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, it was demonstrated that the status of “transitional culture” and “transitional society” were not *reserved* only for post-socialist and post-colonial societies of the second and the third world, which by globalizations should have been integrated into the neoliberal economic market system, but the developed societies of the West (the USA, EU, Japan, Australia) found themselves in the processes which went beyond their control and transformed the stable order of dominance, supervision and state governance into the unexpected “transitional event” of the de-territorialized networks of corporative interests and capital.<sup>22</sup> In other terms, the very global system of neoliberal economic market found itself in transition, and that means in crisis situations and events which could potentially lead to various and potentially unexpected directions of resolution. The pressure created by the global crisis *had to* exacerbate the questions about the critical potentials within

the contemporaneity of architecture, art and culture. After postmodern as the situation of real or illusionary non-conflicts, architecture has again become the crisis and focal issue of the social, i.e. the power, governance, control, standard, economics, hegemony.

Aesthetician and theoretician of contemporary art, Boris Groys, in the writings “Comrades of Time” presents the following initial question on the identity of contemporary art:

Contemporary art deserves its name in so far as it manifests its own contemporaneity / and this is not simply a matter of being recently made or displayed. Thus, the question ‘What is the contemporary art?’ implicates the question ‘What is the contemporary?’ How could the contemporary as such be shown?<sup>23</sup>

In order to answer the questions posed, Groys mobilizes and puts to use different meanings of the word “contemporary”. He demonstrates that contemporary does not mean only the presence of now and here, but also the manner in which one can be “with time” unlike of being “in time”. Using the German term for the notion of contemporary, *zeitgenössisch*, he singles out the meaning of the word „genosse“ which means „Comrade“, so that the notion *zeitgenössisch* is translated as „to be comrade with time“ or „to be comrade of time“, which means collaborate and interact with time. Thus, if this debate of contemporary art is applied to architecture one can say that not each architecture emerging now and here is contemporary, but that contemporary architecture is the one collaborating with its own time.

*That* which determines contemporary architecture is not the question of aesthetic or poetic, namely, cultural style in architecture, but in the literary sense phenomenological and functional closeness of modalities ensued from architecture and modalities of organization and reorganization of human life in bio-political<sup>24</sup> technologies. Phenomenological and functional closeness is achieved in completely uncertain intervals and dislocations of the real space and time which make the actualized global, but not hybridized planetary order. The global order even despite politically promised mass media transparency, exists with certain *white* and/or *dark* stains which cannot be read and lead to reason monitored negotiation and agreement. The reason itself and the hope of reason become open to potential perverting by means of “flexible schemes” which replace the invariant abstract political knowledge” (*general intellect*) and invariance of political, social, cultural, architectural and art institutions in “bio-Darwinism”, i.e. in the merciless struggle for survival at the time of

global crisis, and that means in dialectic vocabulary the total crisis<sup>25</sup> of the technologies of power and technologies of life shaping.

In this context it is essential also to consider the philosophical consequences of the notion “flexible subject of architecture”. The notion “flexible” emerges in one of the early writings by Brian Holmes “Flexible personality – For the New Cultural Critique”. The presented theses were later on critically revised by him. Holmes has written an optimistic study with certain criticism additions, whereby the role of “flexible personality” has been recognized as the late effect of the “anti-authoritarian” forms of emancipation in the tolerant conditions of Clinton era in the USA and social-democratic *soft aid* in Europe. The ideality of “flexible personality” or “flexible culture” was one of really late effects of emancipatory idealizing of “cultural mobility” in the late modernism and trans-national postmodernism. It was discussed about transcultural mobility or about art/cultural nomadism as one of the forms of global emancipation and liberation. But, it was already in the first half of the first decade of the new century, that paradigms of nomadism, mobility, transcultural were transformed in the pragmatic notion of “flexible” (changeable, adaptable) in the field of doing business on the market. Flexible are termed those forms of life or social, cultural, architectural and art practices which are sufficiently changeable and adaptable to survive in the conditions of *bio-Darwinist struggle for survival* in contemporary neoliberal market orientated society. Finally, Holmes pointed out with critical skepticism that:

The flexible personality represents a contemporary form of governmentality, an internalized and culturalized pattern of ‘soft’ coercion, which nonetheless can be directly correlated to the hard data of labor conditions, bureaucratic and police practices, border regimes and military interventions. Now that the typical characteristics of this mentality – and indeed of this ‘culture-ideology’ – have come fully into view, it is high time that we intervene as intellectuals and citizens.<sup>26</sup>

Flexible schemes denote “flexible institutions”, deriving the “new flexible personality”, i.e. flexible individualization and flexible subjectivization which corresponds to the notions of the new “flexible work” and “flexible economics” – which is often termed *crisis*, i.e. *unstable* “post-Fordist work”<sup>27</sup> and “immaterial work”<sup>28</sup> or “cognitive work” within unstable conditions of market struggle.

It is my thesis that “contemporary” in relation to the time of the global economic crisis can be termed the spatial-time life flexibility which *instantaneously*

gets modified, adapts itself, dislocates and temporalizes in relation to critical and crisis social stimuli. Whereas Groys, at the time of almost unquestioned domination of neoliberal flexible and abstracted system of economic power which dictates the character of *all activities*, recognized “contemporary” as the concord with the time and not necessarily being in time, today amidst one of the peaks of the crisis – which between 2011 and 2012 emerged as an opaque screen towards the future – “contemporary” is identified as really *instantaneous* reaction to the catastrophically altered situation.

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# ARCHITECTURE THROUGH SPORT

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## A B S T R A C T

We can find certain parallelism between architecture and sport in history (Rome) and in contemporaneity with spectacular sport as most global kind of entertainment, and recognizable sport architecture as sign of its universal presence. London Olympic Games 2012 followed slogan „Architecture for Humanity”, adding ecological and social concern to more traditional idea of sport objects as modern cathedrals. Sport architecture has become a statement, and it embodies ideology which turns sport into reason for hope. Sport architecture is created on the field where standardization of space (and time) exists for more than hundred years, together with concentration of power in sport associations which, during these hundred years, changed their identity from civil society movements into capital enterprise institutions. Original meaning of “sport” (desportes, deport) as activity deported beyond regular and ordinary everyday life was extended into new region of space and time where mass media entertainment is produced. Contemporary sport architecture has to follow specifically sport rules for playground space, and rules of media presence. Sport places are spaces where massive audience watches the game, and were it watches itself watching – to be seen by massive media audience whose virtual presence is perhaps today the most important concern of architectural design for sport.

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## KEY WORDS

SPORT ARCHITECTURE

GLOBALITY

STANDARDIZATION OF SPACE

DEPORTATION

MASSIVE AUDIENCE

MEDIA PRESENCE



During the last fifty years, sport has become a global phenomenon. So has architecture. Global is not the same as international: it is not managed by nation states system exclusively. And it is not just a refreshed version of “international style”. It might be risky to try recognizing “global style” in these two omnipresent signs of unified earthly empire. What there is without any doubt is global competition: *citius, altius, fortius*. In this competition, there are no preordained hierarchies: Qatar can prevail over United States of America, and West Indies can beat Great Britain at its own game. No authoritative center exists, but symbolic power of world’s unification is felt both in architecture and in sport.

We can find similar parallelism between architecture and sport in history. Ancient Rome, step by step conquering the Mediterranean region and beyond, spreading around the recognizable pattern of imperial architecture, and the system of games which expanded even more than Rome’s territorial reach.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning, games were something important for Rome’s identity, but rare and special, organized just few times a year. At the end, in calendar there were more festive days for games than the ordinary ones. At their start, the games were popular, but humble spectacles, if compared with excessive magnitude and cost they reached when the Empire was powerful, and later, when it was already in decay. Rome conquered other nations and cultures, but left them to live with their culture after they were believed to be powerless enough. Rome’s hegemony, i.e. rule without permanent use of pressure and violence, consisted of few constant pillars, and one of them were greater and more and more numerous spectacles staged in monumental buildings. Initially, as Lukian has it, spectacles were multiplied to keep poor Roman *populus* in good mood, but they served for all the other peoples as well, especially after all grown up men in the Empire became Roman citizens from 212 on.<sup>2</sup> Presence of spectacles and of imperial architecture was a sign of power, and symbolic sign of control over life itself. This sign was inviting, attractive and popular, which means that it served its purpose very well, much better than any possible kind of oppressive Romanization. With the first emperors, spectacles became privilege of state and of the emperor personally: many of them, especially the gladiator games in amphitheaters, became completely monopolized and personalized by the emperor himself. The games, together with a system of buildings for them, spread all over the country to allow each and every inhabitant to have one of them within easy reach and were a tool of hegemony and of governance.<sup>3</sup>

Today, sport and sport architecture are everywhere, and their presence is a sign of belonging to global unified civilization. Stadiums are the most visible and visited places everywhere around the world.<sup>4</sup> It is possible not to have a museum, but not to have a place for sports would be a sign of real backwardness. The sport network is spread all around the world. The International Olympic Committee

has 68 global sport federations included and 204 National Olympic Committees in member states; FIFA has 209 national football associations as its members. Currently, there are 193 members of the United Nations, which makes sport associations and football associations among them more international and global than any other organized relationship of global human race. Sport has become one of signs of the presence of global unity, and the symbol of unified global culture. This includes recognizable patterns of sport architecture all around the world. Not as a kind of imperial style, because there are less monumental stadiums, as Sir John Guise Sport Stadium built and donated by China to Port Moresby of Papua New Guinea for the 1991 South Pacific Games (which still can host 50.000 spectators), and more monumental ones, as Rungrado May Day Stadium in Pyongyang where, beside national football team and sporadic athletic competitions, it is the place of Arirang festival which honors Kim Il-Sung's birthday each April with a month long gymnastic exercises performed with precision and colorful movement of masses of people – something well known to those who still remember Tito's birthday – The Day of Youth festivals at The Yugoslav People's Army Stadium in Belgrade on May 25.<sup>5</sup> Of course, there is also a huge number of other sport facilities and buildings, not all of them architecturally meaningful or great, but in ideal competition they all have their place at the chart which shows a growing network of unified and standardized appearance of sport and its specially designed spaces and places.

The recent crisis and a bit older ecological and ethical concerns have changed sport architecture in at least two aspects. One aspect is that there is a move from eternal monumentality which often becomes a desert after a big event has passed by to temporary structures which can partly or completely disappear or turn into "multifunctional" ones. They are not made for one use only. As flexible and complex structures, these sport facilities are functional, but not as a kind of traditional "purity": what they want to achieve is social response which accepts them. Another one brings understanding of sport and its architecture as a space of alternative culture or at least a place of difference from ordinary life. This alternative is neither radical nor revolutionary; it is just creation of space which is on the other side of competing individualisms and different from troubled communion of labor and capital. This two-fold change has a slogan: "Architecture for humanity". It is reflected in London 2012 Olympic Games architecture which is predominantly simple and built without desire to excel and perplex. With two exceptions to the rule: Aquatic Center (Zaha Hadid Architects) and Velopark (Hopkins Architects) planned to become permanent buildings for municipal recreational use. But even they, quite attractive and monumental, have to pay tribute to demand of low energy costs and overall ecological concerns. Their sport use is different (cycling, BMXs competition; swimming, diving etc.),

but they have something else in common: simple symbolic structure; in case of Aquatic Center it is the water wave, in case of Velopark it is velodrome cycling curve. It already got a popular name: “The Pringle”. Different sources of symbolic shape but the result is quite similar. Still, these symbolic structures would like to express Coubertin’s idea that what we need are cathedrals of sport, because they have to become new targets of mass pilgrimage, and because they represent a place of hope. Here, ethical concerns of sport are directly translated into aesthetic result: beautiful efficiency, where everything is designed ergonomically, ecologically and on friendly terms with its surroundings (people and nature included) and financially sustainable. That is what is meant by contemporary functional architecture: it is not just adapted to immediate function but it has to show many social functional concerns, and at the same time offer sport as part-time solution to most if not all of contemporaneity troubles. Charles Jencks<sup>6</sup>, visiting the Olympic Village (which, as usual, should become new London neighborhood after the Games), disappointed by the main stadium but thrilled by Aquatic Center and Velopark, said that it was nice to see that London and England decided to use Olympic Games and their architecture for Europeization and egalitarianism. He may be right or wrong, but sport architecture has become a statement and more than a statement: embodied ideology which turns sport into reason for hope in times when there are not many other reasons. This kind of ideology is not aggressive as physical culture and sport ideologies used to be in times of nationalism, militarism and/or totalitarianism. Aesthetically speaking, this ideology, when confronted with realities of elite sport or inaccessibility of sport and health culture to most people, sounds sleazy but not aggressive.

Of course, these grandiose buildings are just the tops of the iceberg, with hundreds of sport halls and other sport and recreational facilities built for schools, municipalities and other institutions, but also they mark the trend, and this trend is global.

But how can something like sport become global, unified, and omnipresent and even an object of special type of architecture which makes our global culture recognizable and sport something typically universal and monumental? And what power is symbolized by global sport and its architecture?

## MASSIVE AND FINE

First and obvious condition, typical for sport during the last hundred years, is standardization of space. There are certain rules which determine how each kind of sport has to be practiced, including playground measures. There are other rules which apply, like those of security, as in other public buildings, but these

are determined by state authorities mostly. Standard shape of sport playground is, however, determined by sport authorities, and is the same for any place on the Earth. For most important international competitions these rules include even more prescripts which go well beyond measurements of their playgrounds and determine number of seats, comfort for athletes and judges and journalists and general audience, accessibility, and facilities for grand media coverage. Those sports which do not have global authority with power to standardize their rules all around the globe, all facilities included, are not members of “the family”. Standardization of organization of space and of its functionality has reached much higher level than any other rules and prescripts, for instance those for theaters or museums, hospitals and even airports.

This leads to another condition, that of concentration of power. There is no global standardization, including guidelines for global architecture, without global power to install and sustain equal rules for sport games all around the world, with comparability of results but also with ability to judge, punish and regulate, to manage and to sign good contracts. This power grew from a situation when in different localities different sports were played, rules were loose and negotiable and there were no authorities above single competition. Basic entity was sport club, and from there on, during the last 150 years, local, national, and finally continental and global associations were constituted step by step. This pyramid is extremely hierarchical if examined from civil society access, but also extremely flexible if approached from business side. No other part of culture accepted prescriptions of market and media orientation so willingly and so completely in short period of time. Sport was the first domain to install global concentration of power constructed from national civil societies’ organizations into global institutions with all prerogatives of independent and sovereign power but without genuine internationality which can be constructed by nation states only. At sport field the sport law governs as much as it concerns game itself but some out-of-game concerns too. For instance, universal anti-doping control is done everywhere according to sport associations guidelines and rules including out-of-competition control and even anti-racism rules for behavior of audiences are modeled according to international associations and Olympic Committee prescriptions. Concentration of power in sport created certain state of exception: spaces where legal and capital power belongs to civil society associations and not only to nation state authorities. This does not mean that things did not change considerably from the first days when sport was more or less completely in hands of clubs, athletes, veteran athletes and those who helped them with sponsorship. If hundred years ago sport power emerged from civil society associationism, now it resides within capital flow. Ancient sport management consisted of veteran athletes and representatives of fans; nowadays, sport associations and clubs

are governed by capital management. Sport associations, sport clubs and sport recreation: they are all now part of management of capital and their organization changed into post-industrial quasi civil society surplus value enterprise. Nation state authorities and local political power enter this field with taxpayer's money to produce development effects, share the glory of sport festivals and achieve much cherished sport victories for their national and local communities. They fight to become politically influential but have to accept sport associations rules even in that respect, as proved by conflict over Bosnia and Herzegovina football association leadership which was not allowed to apply "Dayton" idea of giving presidential position to representative of each entity for a while during one term. For the sake of national success and to prevent expulsion they had to obey global FIFA and UEFA law and change their football constitution, which in this country could never happen in any other domain. No Dayton in sport.

Sport, however, is not just elite sport covered by global media attention. Looked upon from this point of view, it resembles proverbial icebergs which have much more of their structure hidden below water. One of important features of this massive structure is mass itself. Mass is not just any grouping of people, not even if they appear in great numbers. Mass is a huge group of people representing all strata of population, a mixture of different classes, sexes, ages, ethnic and national groups, races etc. Mass is non-stratified appearance of otherwise stratified society and sport is very good opportunity for masses because it is on the other side of ordinary life with its divisions and grouping. This mixture, a typical product of modernity, is at the same time the nightmare of modern order, believed to be inclined to excess and explosion.<sup>7</sup> In high culture, even during democratization of culture as official politics, mass groupings were prevented or put into framework of some kind of regulation. To regulate sport masses, all kinds of regulations were introduced, including architectural set-up and actual fences. Architectural rules now include urbanization of whole areas around greatest sport objects, including special access corridors where different parts of audience are isolated in their approach to events and complete turn-around in presence of masses at objects themselves. In the old times, some fifty years ago, fans were concentrated around playground, more or less in touch with players, while socially privileged parts of public were watching from a greater distance and height. New sport objects do not allow for direct contact between audience and sport field and put most privileged people near playground while "masses" are under supervision and control, isolated in their special segments and sectors. But, for sport, massive presence of people has another characteristics as well: that of huge number of real and potential consumers who practice sport and therefore buy sport requisites, come to sport events as those who consume even more than proverbial urban one-day guests and are ready to pay for healthy image sport as

way of life offers. What now already ancient Hugh Hefner's "Playboy" and even his later follower "Playgirl" propagated is that play is first sport and then sex and other pleasures: one has to look good and healthy, or, one has to pretend it.<sup>8</sup>

This change of social structure on stadiums for mass sport entertainment was facilitated by another characteristic which is mentioned in connection with contemporary sport from the early days of mediatization and on.<sup>9</sup> Today, easy accessible sport programs are everywhere in virtual space, in every home, at anybody's desk(top). Experience of sport at the spot became closer to that of theatre: to share the same physical space is the elite difference if compared with plebeian and ordinary being plugged-in by media, where you can get much more visual and other information, special support by image and voice to make even most dull events sensational and get connected with movement from perspectives which are out of reach for those physically present at the event. One of the results of this change was that fans ("real fans", as they would define themselves as opposed to those who watch from their armchairs) are now the prevailing part of sport audience at the spot, another is that sport facilities and buildings are planned and executed with much more care about visitors' comfort – and comfort of media (especially accessibility and visibility for cameras and infrastructural support), with a consequence that physically present audience appears as "representative" group for those watching from media distance, which turned spectators on the spot into theatrical group appearing on TV, similar to those who applaud or laugh at sitcoms and other TV programs (or, if we want to get atavistic, to ancient Greek chorus). But those who laugh at TV sitcoms are usually invisible whereas sport spectators appear. The whole sport facility with its architectural support is now a stage. This is the most important change for sport because all mediatized sports changed their rules to make themselves both more watchable from the armchair and more theatrical in their physical presence. New sport architecture has to support this total staging of the event, players and audience included. And it appears itself as monumental background, at moments as the front even as with the help of air view used at the biggest events to create a feeling of monumentality and importance. As a result, even architecture is made not just for the beholder who approaches and occupies the building. It is created for the eye of the camera much more than any other kind of architecture. Is there any kind of architecture to appear as globally and as often as sport architecture? Not even White House or Bilbao museum can compete with football stadiums and grand halls of spectacle.

Standardized global models, concentration of (civil society, state and international) power, mass entertainment with need to control public space and public response and total mediatization: all these together are circumstances quite favorable for architectural approach, but less open for experiments and

postmodern manifold architectural languages: even oil station can survive with postmodern architecture's approach, including mazes, mirroring and mixture of languages, but sport premises cannot. Starting from the field which has to be done according to the rules, things are functionally defined, but this functionality does not have to be minimization of space and its shapes to bare functionality as in functionalism. Quite contrary, monumentality now goes together with comfort and visual pleasure. Taken all together, sport architecture is expected to support and make appearance of sport and sport events co-operate as massive and fine at the same time.

Where did this massive and fine sport arrive from historically?

## DEPORTATION

Word *sport* is the English form developed from older French and other Roman languages *de(s)portes*, from Latin *deportare*, a member of well-developed family which today includes port, import and export, transport, support, deportation and many others. How can sport and deportation belong to the same roots? Initially there is a verb, a movement which involves carrying from one side to another, across dividing line and which, however, has its opening which allows for passage. It involves, of course, a change of location, but together with a change of location it involves a change of regime as well: for better or for worse. In deportation, obviously, change for the worse prevailed, and it now means that a person was expelled from its "home" somewhere else against his or her will, and was put under control of special regime, usually administered by the nation state. It is not a situation, as that of exile, but movement from one regime to another. It is similar with sport/de(s)portes: it denotes those pastimes and practices which cannot enter the territory of ordinary life. Ordinary life is life put under certain order, usually supported by legislation and always administered by power of some kind. To be inside space of administered order is safe but less free. Outside the space of administered order are those activities which are not allowed to enter the space where power reigns but are allowed to go on beyond its limits. This was a case of the theater in Shakespeare's time: it was not allowed inside city walls, so it had to exist on the other side of the Thames, where all other sports from prostitution to May carnivals had their place. Revolution wanted to get rid of theater, even art as such: it was a Puritan event. Only after Glorious Revolution theater was allowed inside London's walls. At the same time, it was tamed by architecture and entered its progress towards *Italian theater* model, where hierarchy of audience put all visitors in their proper places to represent society as such together with social capital and social divides each stratum represented and inhabited.



Sport, however, remained on the other side of order for quite some time, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And it did change its scope from all kind of activities which were conducted without restraint of public order or realms discipline at the same time. Which means that “sport”, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century even in England could still mean an easy way to understand the laws of mathematics, or, all kinds of activities we call “hobbies” nowadays. What “sport” amounted to was not only physical activity spent in competition, it covered all activities which belonged to leisure time. This, by the way, exemplifies how division of space (territory of order vs. territory of lewdness) turned into division of time (labor time vs. free time), but it also makes visible how architecture entered sport: as one of the tools which had to turn plebeian wild and free entertainment into “fine sport”, and at the same time allow for its entrance into organized and supported leisure. Organization of space, which enters theater (earlier) and sport (later) as a result of specific cultural turn from plebeian to fine entertainment is essential for modern society in which people have to be free and under control at the same time. They have to be free because they are expected to appear on the market, at least with their ability to exchange labor for capital, but they also have to be under control even during their free time to make private ownership of the means of production safe.

## CONCLUSION

The process which took sport away from its plebeian roots to produce mass sport recreation and sport mediatization, which put sport under control of international associations turned into capital corporations and which developed sport into global sensation and spectacle is at the same time a process which produced sport architecture as part of global investment in sport economy and in “sportization” of urban environment. That sport turned into profitable business on grand scale and at the same time managed to become grand global spectacle, are the two fundamental moves which changed sport and its architecture during the last fifty years. During this change, it was however most important to keep and even inflate sports’ attractiveness, especially media attractiveness, and its “democratic” accessibility to all strata of society, again, especially through media. We remember Walter Benjamin with his claims that masses demand aesthetic pleasure to get as near as possible and that they demand technical reproducibility of aesthetic pleasure and thrill. There is no doubt that these two directions shaped contemporary sport. But, important even in architectural terms: How near is near? To be near represents a break between my body and the object which is near to it: minimal break perhaps but still a break and not immediate access or even a direct touch. It seems that the most important change in sport architecture during the last decades is constant and persistent introduction of



“break” and “gap” in sports’ public space. Spectatorship, obviously, is so different from traditional presence at sport games that it demands a gap between audience and event even if it is near to invisible. And most of the time it is not invisible anyway, quite the contrary, because these breaks and gaps were introduced together with safety concerns so that these obstructions and fences are not just like English garden’s “ha-ha” but real and quite visible thing. Those who remember previous arrangements, some fifty years ago, could say that then it was possible for audience and players to get together immediately after the game came to an end. This was sometimes awkward and unwelcome, sometimes even violent but the need to install the line of divide did not burst out just for safety reasons. It was installed to divide two scenes which both became so important for mediatized spectacle: physically present public which embodies representation of all the others who watch without physical presence at the spot of the game and physically present players. The division between media public and live audience demands that this division is enacted to mark the importance of media audience through representation. Masses want their aesthetic pleasure to be as near as possible but not without division: what they want is theatricality, and not (physical) absorption. If we think about the idea behind fan groups, which are something very different from much older supporters of the club, this idea means glorifying your chosen competitor and putting it on the pedestal, not (as it used to be) to become equal immediately after the match, drinking beer together and discussing what went right or wrong. The distancing in nearness, this “having all at a grip of a hand” approach of new media, does not allow for intimate relationship between players and their public. And that it is what contemporary architecture takes care of as well.

Deportation, as original meaning of sport as being deported from realm of imposed rules of behavior (scene) into realm where you can practice what you like (obscene), applies in these new circumstances in reverse direction. Sport has finally become “fine sport” and has been arranged and administered as such. Being simplified and regulated more and more to appeal to *Jederman* of Media Republic and turned into accessible healthy practices of fitness and wellness (which represent negation of sport as competitive joy and of physical culture as triumph of collectivity), sport is in danger of getting disconnected from its original background in play. What is lacking in precise, efficient and goal-oriented recreation is precisely – playfulness of sport; what is needed in enormously grown and developed system of professional sport, spectacularized and divided from its audience by its architecture, is some real, corporeal and sensual pleasure and less of distant theatricality created by imposed limits of sublime spectacle. Both sport and architecture should not get disconnected from their origin: “It’s about body, stupid!”

## NOTES

- 1 On political impact of Roman games and architecture, including comparison with Greek festivals, see: Paul Plass, *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome: Arena Sport and Political Suicide* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1955). Famous Juvenal's accusation of Roman *plebs* whose communal desire was reduced to »*panem et circenses*« (bread and circus) is from his Satire 10 (in Latin – <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/juvenal/10.shtml>).
- 2 Roman citizenship was given to all free male subjects of empire by Caracalla with his *Constitutio Antoniana* in 212.
- 3 On Roman hegemony in spectacles, see my article »Tertullian i Hegelova romantičarska forma umetnosti«, *TkH*, 3(6), 2003, 69-81.
- 4 On criticism of Olympic games and Olympic movement, see: Ljubodrag Simonović, *Olimpijska podvala »božanskog Barona« Pjera de Kubertena* (Nikšić: Univerzitetska riječ, 1988) and Ljubodrag Simonović, *Filozofski aspekti modernog olimpiзма* (Beograd: Simonović, 2009). Another and similar case against Olympic games can be found in works of Jean-Marie Brohm, especially in: Jean-Marie Brohm, 1936: *Les Jeux olympiques á Berlin* (Bruxelles: André Versaille, 2008). and Jean-Marie Brohm, *La Tyrannie sportive: Théorie critique d'un opium du peuple* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2006).
- 5 On May 25 festival, see: "Lev Kreft, Days of Youth: Political Aesthetics and Physical Culture," in *Sporting Reflections: Some Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Sheridan H., L. Howe and K. Thompson (Oxford: Meyer&Meyer Sport, 2007), 8-19.
- 6 Charles Jencks is one of most outstanding architectural theorists of post-modern architecture, starting from global bestseller *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (NY: Rizzoli, 1977). His influence on theories of post-modernism, and of contemporary architecture is quite substantial. In relation to difference between modernism and post-modernism, Jencks belongs to those who see post-modernism as another kind of modernism.
- 7 For two typical cases on this fear of the masses which are inevitable component of modern life, see: Gustave Le Bon, *La Psychologie des foules* (1895), available at: <http://envole.net/enote/doc/20080418-Gustave-le-bon-psycho-des-foules-alcan.pdf>, and in translation as *Psihologija gomila* (Beograd and Čačak: Kukić and Gradac, 2007). Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), available at <http://pinkmonkey.com/library1/revolt/pdf>.
- 8 On Hugh Hefner's male style of independent life, and on »Playboy« architecture, see: Beatriz Preciado, *Pornotopía: Arquitectura y sexualidad en "Playboy" durante la guerra fría* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2010).
- 9 On the impact of masses on culture, see: Walter Benjamin, *Eseji* (Beograd: Nolit, 1974). especially his essay »The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction«, which can be accessed in English at: <http://design.wishiewashie.com/HTS/WalterBenjaminTheWorkofArt.pdf>.

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# SPACES OF DISAGREEMENT

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## A B S T R A C T

The text asks how dissent can be organized spatially. Although, taking recent developments in arts, architecture and urban planning into consideration, the focus is put on two projects of the artist and architect Apolonija Šušteršič: the café *KAFIČ*, commissioned by Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, and the Community Pavilion in Hustadt, commissioned by the municipality of Bochum. Following these examples the text discusses the possibilities of how to transmute social antagonism into agonism thereby creating a vibrant public sphere that allows the expression of competing notions, opinions and approaches.

## KEY WORDS

DISSENT  
CONFLICT  
DISAGREEMENT  
PUBLIC  
SPACE  
ANTAGONISM  
AGONISM

At the most general of levels, architecture and urban planning seek to organize space.

However, what if there is no consent how to do that? This is increasingly the case when it comes to public spaces. What if authoritarian planning – able to repress conflicts of interests – is not legitimate any longer? What if, municipal authorities, planning committees, entrepreneurs, housing associations and residents are neither able to come to an agreement with one another nor within the groups themselves? For some years now – aside from architects and urban planners – artists have been invited to find solutions for participation and inclusion. Ironically, they are quite often asked by architects and urban planners to join them. It might also be fair to say that in this regard art is overloaded with expectations. Artists are rightly critical of this. The artist, Kristina Leko, for instance, clearly does not accept the idea that art can solve problems or compensate for societal deficiencies and relieve politics of its responsibilities. In her view ‘art cannot replace urban planning or other social disciplines’. Leko is interested far more in the social potential of art itself, which she believes has the capacity to “generate changes in relationships and perceptions.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the expectation that art might compensate for societal deficiencies, specifically the disintegration of public life, has not merely emerged in recent years. This notion was already aired in 1973 at the Deutscher Städtetag in Bremen and featured in an aspirational paper on ‘art in public spaces’. In view of the ongoing debate concerning the disintegration of public life and urban living spaces, pedagogical and socio-political demands were now being imposed on art, which was to stimulate communication, combat isolation, create new room for manoeuvre and act as a counter-balance to the constraints imposed by the constraints of daily life.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the fact that art is regarded here as an instrument of sorts, all these demands are based on the same concept of public life: ideally it is conceived by equals as a sphere for equals. But what if this ideal entity no longer exists? What if different socialisations have formed regardless of topographical considerations and exist in parallel to each other, if an ‘entity’ is not even imaginable any more?

To discuss these issues profoundly I would like to take up one example: the work of the artist and architect Apolonija Šušteršič. Concretely I would like to present two projects, one she did for Leipzig and one for Bochum, both in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009 Apolonija Šušteršič and Meike Schalk accepted my invitation to redesign the café at the Stiftung Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst (GfZK) in Leipzig. The new *KAFIČ* – the name that was ultimately chosen for the refurbished café – was to be a place that not only expressed diverse cultural experiences but where different cultures could meet, creating and sharing space with each other. This idea was similar to that of Hustadt in Bochum. There was also a similarity in the fact that the café would owe its existence to so many parties besides the GfZK – the authorities, various associations, municipal partnerships and numerous volunteers. Šušteršič and Schalk made a particular point of working with groups who are not normally especially visible and who have little or no space of their own in public life. These groups were to be explicitly given space; besides being invited to contribute to the refurbishment of the café they were to make this space their own and use it as a meeting place. Ultimately – again like the Hustadt project – *KAFIČ* has taken some time to realize. Over the course of two years a series of workshops took place, on topics including the basics of furniture construction and how to work with textiles, which have seen the two artists making a series of visits to Leipzig. Strictly speaking the café is still not finished – it is still constantly changing even although it is already in business.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Leipzig and Hustadt in the commissioning client: in Bochum it was a municipal authority, in Leipzig it is a contemporary art institution. Moreover the publicly funded project in Bochum was much more exposed and the financial implications that much greater. This was an urban development project, for which an artist was invited to take up a residency and to become involved in the redesign of the Brunnenplatz in Hustadt. For some decades now this part of Bochum has been undergoing a process of immense transformation. Over the years it has moved on from the initially utopian aspirations of its beginnings in the 1960s and has progressed towards what might be described as a lived reality of different life models. Today this part of Bochum has a culturally mixed populace with very different ideas on social co-existence. In addition to this there are the many assumptions, classifications and notions presented in the press and media on what it means to live in Hustadt or to administer this ‘city in a city’. Hustadt is a highly complex web of connections and vested interests, of political, economic, social and artistic aims; there are the needs of its residents, who value low living costs and informal networks, and the aspirations of its local political leaders, who are determined to raise the standard of living and to increase the appeal of this district as a whole for ‘not-already-Hustadtters’. As yet, in Hustadt there is no viable public space where, despite the diversity of

origins and views, residents can come together to discuss common concerns, a space that is equally open to all, that individuals can identify with.

That was the situation Šušteršič found when she embarked on her project in Hustadt; her project there had to contend with different – one might also say, competing – interests and forces to those of the café project in Leipzig. For one thing is true of all art projects in public spaces: they are open to criticism, they are exposed – much more than in the protected realms of an art institution. Different codes apply, different modes of perception and a different willingness to engage, or rather not to engage with an art project. Art in public spaces is more controversial and sometimes even literally destroyed. At times it is used as a political football, more often it is just ignored.

There is also the fact that with time notions of both art and public spaces have radically changed. Although we might applaud the fact that people have a more differentiated understanding of art in public spaces, the overall situation has not become easier, because this also means that expectations of art in public spaces have been raised. In other words, art that is appreciated for its own sake, regardless of its surroundings, has now been joined by site-specific art, art-in-the-public-interest and new-genre-public art.<sup>4</sup> The demonstrative lack of connection between work and surroundings was met in the 1960s and 70s with the new demands of site specificity, whereby the particularities of a place, its situation, its history and its function all played into the artistic concept. Increasingly municipal authorities, planning committees, entrepreneurs and housing associations involved artists in the design of public and semi-public spaces, in the hope that the urban experience in their city would be enhanced by art, in order to foster positive identification and public life. In the 1980s the potential of art in public spaces was often reduced to financially beneficial image and location factors. For some years now, be it in the East or the West, in Germany or elsewhere, artists have been invited to actively engage with social transformation and with the places affected by change, to come up with proposals for new uses and changes of use, and/or to stimulate participation and a sense of community. The expectations of art in these circumstances are immense; in the best case scenario these days artistic, socio-cultural and political aspects come together, public life is enhanced, value is added *and* a particular image policy is pursued. Interestingly, at various times each of these aspects individually has dominated the discourse and counter-discourse on art in public spaces: in the 1970s the focus was on public life per se, in the 1980s it was – at least in the West – on image politics and in the 1990s it was on self-empowerment. Today there is a drive to combine all of these aspects.

In her Hustadt project Apolonija Šušteršič addresses people and groups with widely diverse ideas and attitudes: people with very different roots, with assorted cultural backgrounds – students, children, young people, adults and old people, some who have just moved to the area, others who have lived here for many years. Šušteršič's project is notable for the fact that from the outset she took a de facto divergent space as her starting point and set out to investigate existing (antagonistic) spaces in terms of their potential for a coming together in diversity. These antagonistic spaces are political, economic, social and cultural (which these days also crucially includes the media) in nature; they interconnect and overlap, they attract each other, they repel each other and come into conflict. Within and by means of her project Šušteršič creates a conceptual, substantive and spatial framework that allows individuals (perhaps for the first time) to reconsider their own attitudes in light of other attitudes, to articulate different approaches and to seek out common ground – however temporary that might be. The creation of frameworks that make this form of encounter possible was of course not achieved merely by constructing the pavilion that, shortly before its opening, was suddenly the focus of media and political attention; for this was the culmination of a lengthy process that started in 2008 and continued until and beyond the inauguration of the big pavilion – the Community Pavilion. Material and immaterial factors are equally important in this project: these include numerous formal and informal meetings with Hustadt residents, workshops, discussions, but also the mobile-phone-camera project with students, the children's planting action, the temporary pavilion, the café and now the big pavilion with its summer kitchen, its welcome areas, stage and open-air cinema. 'Beyond' the day of the official opening also means that the project is set up in such a way that it can accommodate change – while certain functions may come to an end, new ones will come to replace them.

At this point it is perhaps worth mentioning that Šušteršič is also a trained architect. Her approach in this project has been thoroughly 'architectural'. She has designed a space, but a space that is not static – it is fluid and arises from and is altered by countless actions and movements involving numerous individuals. This intrinsically differentiated, multiple space that is fundamentally grounded in Henri Lefèbvre's concept of space,<sup>5</sup> forms the basis of Šušteršič's approach. In her project for Hustadt her aim has been to create a sense of public life in this socially differentiated, multiple space, which allows individuals to negotiate possible shared issues without having to deny differences.

Šušteršič's efforts to 'create a public space' of course have to be, in the best sense, somewhat utopian. Fundamentally, her Community Pavilion and



various related activities constitute a statement – a possible, contemplable or imaginable version of community and public life. In so doing she highlights the imaginative potential of utopias – as alternatives to the status quo and as an inspiration to create societal spaces with emancipatory energy. Interestingly, it seems these days that not only has utopian thinking very much been pushed into the background, we have also witnessed the demise of various projects designed to promote the partnership of all social groups in political, economic and cultural life. Perhaps one way of reading Šušteršič's work is to see her concrete actions, her activities and projects, as a way of allowing a utopia to momentarily loom into sight and of airing the possibility of community-oriented attitudes and behaviour in an increasingly diverse society.

For the project in Hustadt is and will always be tied to the reality of this part of Bochum. People and groups are addressed here whose attitudes and views are by definition polarised. Competing notions, opinions and approaches come together and go head to head; they clash and can lead to conflict. Šušteršič's project has created a framework that makes it possible not only to reflect these but also to transmute social antagonisms into agonies. This in turn, to cite Chantal Mouffe, leads to 'a vibrant agonistic public sphere' in which different attitudes can be confronted with each other and conflicts are given 'a legitimate form of expression'.<sup>6</sup> And this in turn provides the conditions where individuals can discuss differences and potential common ground, where communities might just stand a chance of forming. In practical terms the situation is not always pleasant, as was already apparent at the opening celebrations for the Community Pavilion. The celebrations began with a programme presented by various groups from Hustadt – from a women's choir to a rapper. Šušteršič organised the evening programme, to which she had invited other artists and myself as speaker. But this second part of the opening celebrations was initially drowned out by children, young people and adults who wanted to play, dance and sing, and who neither had any interest in Šušteršič's programme nor felt like handing over 'their' stage to a small group of art enthusiasts. You could say that this was the litmus test for Šušteršič's project: after an intermediate period of mutual persuasion and intense competition for temporary performers' rights Šušteršič's programme went ahead one hour later than planned. Ultimately a number of Hustadters even joined the audience. I even gave my lecture – no matter that I had to shout for the first ten minutes, just to make myself heard.

## NOTES

N.B.

Translated from the German by Fiona Elliott

- 1 Kristina Leko, "Gesellschaftliche Veränderungen, Selbstermächtigung und Imagination," in: *Schrumpfende Städte*, vol. 2, *Handlungskonzepte*, ed. Philipp Oswalt. (Ostfildern/Ruit: Cantz, 2005). p. 501.
- 2 On this, see also Claudia Büttner: *Art goes public*. (München: Schreiber, 1997). p.137.
- 3 This text is based on two lectures I did on invitation of Apolonija Šušteršič, one about the *KAFIČ* at the GfZK in Leipzig in 2010, and the other one about her Community Pavilion in Hustadt, Bochum, 2011. The latter was held on the occasion of the inauguration of the pavilion. An amended version of this lecture was published for Artes Mundi, Wales.
- 4 See above all Miwon Kwon on site specificity: Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*. (Cambridge/ London: MIT Press, 2002).
- 5 Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1991).
- 6 Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*. (Abingdon and New York: Routledge. 2005). pp. 4 and 76.

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# THE NOTION AND MEANING OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THE STUDIES OF ART AND MEDIA

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## A B S T R A C T

This text attempts to mark the difference between traditional, modern, monodisciplinary and contemporary interdisciplinary approaches within the analysis of reception of media and artistic contents. Monodisciplinary approaches are connected with the classical basis of humanistic and social sciences which are related to the definition of culture based on opposition between mass and elite culture (art). Avant-garde and linguistic turn within social sciences in the 60s realized re-evaluation of the notion of culture-culture is not seen anymore as a sum of elite products of human spirit but rather as a production of cultural meaning, i.e. as a discourse. This turn enabled interdisciplinary turn within the sciences as aesthetics and art history and also enabled the emergence of contemporary interdisciplinary media theory.

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## KEY WORDS

MONODISCIPLINARY  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
MODERNISM  
POSTMODERNISM  
ART THEORY  
AESTHETICS  
ART HISTORY  
AVANT-GARDE  
MEDIA THEORY  
CULTURAL STUDIES

In this text, I am going to attempt, in a broad historical perspective, to mark the difference between the traditional, modernistic monodisciplinary approaches and the contemporary, interdisciplinary methodologies in studying artistic, i.e. media phenomena. The basic difference that separates classic social and humanistic approaches from the phenomenon of interdisciplinarity is a cut in the interpretation of the notion of culture. In modernistic key, culture is determined exclusively within the opposition: high, elite vs. mass culture. As opposed to this, in postmodernistic key:

Culture is spilled all over society; it becomes omnipresent even in the minutest, banal details of everyday life. Losing the aura that it gained in the modern age, ceasing to signify the special and the most valuable field of human action, postculture backs away from the concept of value, universality, quality, superiority and independence in relation to the powers of economy and politics, becoming a space where they mingle into symbolic answers of different social groups and individuals to their action.<sup>1</sup>

Classically, elitist and humanistic oriented interpretation of culture can be related to the very beginnings of modernity forming, i.e. to the beginnings of constituting social- humanistic scientific disciplines, on one hand and the concept of the autonomy of art, on the other hand. Jürgen Habermas, referring to the settings of Max Weber, considers that the modern concept of culture occurs with the Enlightenment's project: culture of modernity occurs with the separation of idea of the reason from the prevailing ideas of that time – religion and metaphysics. In the mature 18<sup>th</sup> century, once united system of classical knowledge, i.e. theological view of the world, is separated into independent, autonomous fields of science, morals and art: human action, thus, becomes split into „ special aspects of validity“- to truth, normative correctness, authenticity and beauty. Human cognition of the world becomes reduced to the issues of objective, rational knowledge, secular justice and morals and taste. Additionally, rational, exact, objective cognition of reality becomes reserved for science, while spontaneous, irrational, intuitive and expressive creation for the autonomous field of art (which is the difference that Immanuel Kant will define as a difference between the practical mind and the judgment of taste, what will become the basis of all modernistic characterizations of the work of art). According to Habermas,

Science, theories of morals, jurisprudence, production and criticism of art, could be all institutionalized. Each field of culture could respond to cultural profession where the problems would be treated as a job for special experts. This professionalized treatment of cultural tradition

brings into focus internal structures of each of the three dimensions of culture. These structures are: cognitive-instrumental, morally-practical, aesthetically- expressive rationalities, each of them controlled by a specialist, who seems more eager than other people to follow the logic in these special fields. As a result, there is a growing distance between the culture of experts and the culture of broader audience. What becomes culture, through specialized treatment and reflexion, does not become directly and necessarily the containing element of the everyday practice.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, this is the moment not only of establishing the modern understanding of culture as an exclusive and elite segment of human spirit and the practice of production of universal values, but also the moment of formation of theory of art in the modern sense. However, the theory of art implies different specialist disciplines developed in the autonomous social and humanistic sciences (history of art, aesthetics, sociology of art, psychology of art, etc). This is a radically new situation, because in the late 18th and the early 19th century, first of all appeared the mentioned specialization and simultaneously the metalinguistic relationship between art and culture on one hand, and science, i.e. the theory of art, on the other hand: in that sense, the theory of art is a system of “second level” language, metalanguage, whose goal is a rational, an objective, and a systematic research and explanation of the “first level” language of art.<sup>3</sup> This division between theory, i.e. science and art, is a phenomenon that had not existed before the 18th century: moreover, before the Enlightenment, it is hard to even discuss the existence of art in the way we understand it today. In the antique period, art is reduced to a form of manual skill, which is a consequence of a specific systematization of knowledge of that time. The entire classical knowledge was organized according to seven liberal arts, i.e. *Septem Artes Liberales*; these seven liberal arts were divided into two groups: so-called *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and so-called *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music). Both of these categories made a circular, comprehensive knowledge, so-called *paideia*. Painting and sculpture did not belong to this group of liberal arts; the status of liberal arts these disciplines gained in the period of Renaissance with the occurrence of *Studia Humanitatis*.<sup>4</sup> So, in this period, there is still no modern relationship of the separation of artistic theory and the artistic practice (metalinguistic relationship between first level language of arts and second level language of theory); exactly the opposite, in the Renaissance, both practical and theoretic segments of art served the purpose of cognition of the objective appearance of the surrounding world (an artist as a *uomo universalis*, and a painting as a „window to the world“); in other words, the renaissance art is still, in the original sense „theoretical“.<sup>5</sup>

The separation between the artistic practice and the artistic theory comes with the appearance of modern aesthetics whose caring idea will exactly be the concept of the autonomy of art, in the way that Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten defined it, and of course, Kant:

It is only in the eighteenth century, in the kind of account developed in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that we find a form of artistic evaluation that suspends other evaluative standpoints-say, of utility, politics or sensory pleasure-from which the content of a work of art may be judged. Kant does think that aesthetic values, like all values, ultimately are in some way subordinate to moral values but his characterization of the "disinterested" nature of the judgment of taste captures that response to art which is presumably left over when all other evaluative criteria are withdrawn.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, there are three basic categories for establishing the aesthetic modernity: culture, art and the theory of art. Culture is, thus, experienced as an exquisite expression of human spirit and only the elite products of culture become objects of interest of humanistic sciences that started their establishing in the 19th century. Everything that does not belong to exquisite, high art becomes experienced as a part of popular, i.e. mass culture, which is treated as less valuable. Such an understanding of culture remains a commonplace of modernistic approaches to the analyses of society and art, from the right-oriented theorists such as Matthew Arnold and Frank Raymond Leavis, over the Marxist leftist-oriented followers of Frankfurt School (above everyone else Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer), to Kantian-established modernistic art criticism of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg:

The concept of mass society implied that on the historical scene "the crowd" had come and that the lowering of culture was a consequence of such radical realignment of the world. Parallel with the concept of mass society was emergence of the concept of mass culture that marked the new tendency towards the commercialization and industrialization of culture whose goal was the production of profit.<sup>7</sup>

The modernistic concept of culture is, thus, inseparable from the civil-bourgeois conception of the autonomous art- Peter Burger, e.g. the concept of the autonomous art relates to the birth of civil society. With the conquest of power of the economically strengthened civility, rises a systematic aesthetics as a new philosophical discipline.<sup>8</sup>

Left oriented theorists of the Frankfurt School will, naturally, reject such (civil) bourgeois conception of art on behalf of the avant-garde experiment,

but apart from that, because of the modernistic relations with the categories of aesthetic formalism and autonomy, they will still be acting within the dialectics between the high and mass culture (with the difference that the masses will be treated more as a victim and less as a cause of culture's decadence).<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin is an exception who will realize the critique of the civil- bourgeois concept of culture through the thesis of reproducibility of modern mass media; he will shift the emphasis from the analysis of art object to the analysis of the reception of the work of art (and, thus, establish modern theories of reception, as well as modern theory of media) and at the same time he will open up the way to postmodernistic theories that see culture as the overall process of the production of meaning. Benjamin, thus, in his most quoted work - "The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction", makes a key-shift from the theory of art in the modern sense, towards the analysis of the mass-media culture in the postmodern sense.<sup>10</sup>

The modernistic theory of art (the philosophy of art, aesthetics, the history of art, art criticism, etc.) is seen, as in the case of aesthetics, as a group of different philosophical theories that deal with the phenomena of sensory experiences, i.e. sensory awareness "of the facts of nature, of the real and the ideally beautiful", as well as with art in the most general sense. Aesthetics in its traditional form underlines:

(i) the relationship towards art, in the narrow sense, the autonomous notion and the paradigm of art, (ii) the specific kind of cognition or the cognitive abilities (*aesthesis*), or more precise, that what appears in an extraordinary form that can be judged as beautiful (*callistic*). Thereby, Immanuel Kant in his studies of aesthetics indicates the difference between the sensory *beautiful* and the sensory *sublime* (the intellectual feeling, *Geistesgefühl*).<sup>11</sup>

In the case of history of art it is all about constructing the narrative, which deals, as its basic task, with the preservation, classification, chronologization, determination of style, authorship, authenticity of objects, i.e. the pieces that carry the epithet of „artistic“. The central component of such investigation of art is a historical approach that tends towards the narrative reconstruction of the epoch in which the work rises. In the methodological sense, the history of art moves from the form analysis, on one hand, to the content analysis, on the other hand, whereby positivism of the 19th century tended towards the absolute objectivity (in order to get closer to the exactness of natural sciences) and the scientific language purified from any kind of subjectivism, i.e. the deposits of the ideological context. In short, the history of art in its classical,



modern form involves a discipline which deals with „ styles, attribution, dating, authentication, rarities, reconstruction, detection of counterfeits, rediscovery of forgotten artists, the significance of paintings, etc“. <sup>12</sup> Finally, the phenomenon of art criticism as a kind of „derivative“ of the history of art implies:

The discipline that deals with the interpretation and evaluation of modern art phenomena, unlike the science of art history that by definition deals with art from the previous historical periods, including the one of the early modernism. Accordingly, the criticism is considered as the mediator between the world of modern art, on one hand, and the world of public, towards which the criticism is directed, on the other hand. <sup>13</sup>

In any case, the main characteristics of modernistic-based theory (or theories) of art are: 1. meta-textual relationship between the artistic practice on one hand, and the artistic theory, on the other, which actually means that art and writing about art are two completely separate and independent fields of action (art is intuitive, expressive and spontaneous, theory is rational, exact and interpretative), i.e. the interpretation of art is retrospective and it comes afterwards, after the completion of work of art by the artist (the historization of art in the history of art, i.e. the aesthetic valorization and evaluation in the art criticism); 2. elitist concept of culture, which actually means that the object of theory's interest is exclusively art, while mass, pop-culture and media remain beyond its interest (the modern theory of media comes with reshaping of modernistic and humanistic centered social sciences); 3. the analysis of art object, piece, text, i.e. psychological analysis of authorship, while the recipient and audience of the work of art mainly remain outside the interest of the artistic theory; 4. positivism, which means that theory tends towards allegedly exact and objective scientific interpretation of artistic and cultural phenomena, i.e. towards a language that would supposedly be deprived of ideological tinges and particular interests; 5. essentialism, which means that there is a supposed universal and generally applicable determination of the phenomenon of art and the work of art as an „extraordinary“ phenomenon placed within and versus the world; 6. historicism, which means that a work of art has been analyzed, as Jauss noticed, due to the sum of its historical conditions, i.e. within the linear historical narrative as a constructed chronology; 7. formalism, which means that the work of art is viewed within the comprehensive history of style and its formal appearance. <sup>14</sup>

The question is: when did it come to destruction, i.e. deconstruction of such monodisciplinary interpretations of art? There are two central moments: the emergence of avant-garde in the 20th century art and linguistic-constructivist

turn in the humanities that occurred in the 60s and the 70s. Both phenomena will influence the rejection of essentialist-ontological characterization of art and re-evaluation of modernistic conception of culture.

There are numerous answers to the question in what way did avant-garde (i.e. the formations of historical avant-garde, neo avant-garde and post avant-garde) realize the critique of bourgeois conception of culture (politization of aesthetic sphere, utopian idea of blend of art and everyday life, artistic experiment, media interdisciplinarity, aesthetic of shock, rejection of the category of artistic style and its replacement by the category of artistic movement, re-evaluation of art as a social institution, etc).<sup>15</sup> However, our interest here is in what way avant-garde influenced the deconstruction of metalinguistic (metaphysical, ontological and essentialist) relationship between art, i.e. culture on one hand, and theory, on the other, which is a central position of monodisciplinary approaches in the interpretation of art. According to Miško Šuvaković, there are two central concepts of avant-garde that deconstruct the notion of theory of art in the modernistic sense: it is the theory of an artist on one hand, i.e. the theory in art, on the other.

*The theory of an artist* implies a specific form of theoretical work and reflexion of art that is thought, produced, written or performed not any longer by “professional” writers of art (historians, theorists, critics, philosophers) within the intellectual division of labor in the world of art, but by artists themselves. In other words, the theory of an artist is a theoretical production that does not come afterwards, retrospectively, after the work of art is completed, but it is a theoretical work that is parallel and simultaneous with the production and creation of works of art. Moreover, it is the theoretical work that constitutes the intentions of artists and the significance/ meaning of a concrete artistic procedure.

The theory of art, in general, emerges outside the direct demands of artistic creation in specific *institutions of culture* (criticism, sciences about art, aesthetics and the philosophy of art, i.e. special disciplines: psychology, sociology or semiology of art). The theory of an artist, on the other hand, emerges within the very artistic practice, and it is close to interests, intentions, concepts, meanings and values of *production of art* inside *the world of art*. The theory of an artist, as an open historical discipline, appears at the same time as the theory of art, aesthetics, criticism, and the history of art during the 18th century, but unlike them, it is existentially, creatively and poetically related to artistic creation and positioning of the artistic work in culture.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of the theory of an artist will experience the most significant expression within the formation of historical avant-garde and neo avant-garde, since the avant-garde theory of an artist rejects the contextual self-intelligibility of a work of art, which is a part of the idea of the autonomy of art. Contrary to the concept of the autonomy of art is the avant-garde theory of an artist performed as an intertextual practice, which means that the writings of artists and the theories of artists are not closed structures, but they are exposed to influences of other discourses and texts.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the theory of an artist shows that art is not an isolated and self-involving phenomenon, but a process, a practice conditioned by social-historical context, i.e. culture in the most general sense.

*The theory in art* implies, above all, the legacy of conceptual art of the 60s and the 70s which in the spirit of „dematerialization of art object“ rejected the production of art as the creation of finished art objects (paintings, sculptures, graphics etc.), and replaced the category of work of art with the category of philosophical, aesthetic and theoretical discussion.<sup>18</sup> In that sense, with the appearance of conceptualism the status of theory of art has changed: theory is no longer a part of subsequent and retrospective interpretation of finished/complete works of art (theory as a metalanguage and a secondary interpretation), but the creation of theory and the creation of art become a part of the unique and complete process. The projects of the conceptual artists mostly do not tend towards the production of art objects, but they tend to answer the question: “what is art?”, and what are the boundaries of art as a social practice? Inspired primarily by Ludwig Wittgenstein’s analytic theory of language, and then by the linguistic reversal that poststructuralism brought, conceptual artists give a radically relativistic, an anti-essentialist and a constructivist answer: art is a form of linguistic, cultural, theoretical, ideological, historical and social consensus, i.e. construct. This process is minutely explained by a conceptual artist and a theorist Victor Burgin. Referring to the argumentation of French poststructuralist theory, Burgin considers that conceptual art contributed to a definitive delegitimization of modernistic canons of aesthetics and the history of art where the idea of the autonomy of art was implied. Art is in the intertextual overlap with the context in which it emerges, i.e. art is not a concrete, autonomous object, but a form of production of meaning, i.e. *discourse*. Conceptual art, thus, deals exclusively with material presentations of *the discourse of art*, and it rejects the existence of the autonomous ontological characterization of a work of art, i.e. conceptual artists subvert modernistic systems of the legitimization of art. At the same time, as it has already been mentioned, theory is no longer a part of a secondary language in regard to the artistic practice, a part of metanarrative of the „objective“ knowledge, but

rather art and theory have become a relativistic, anti-essentialist and critical analysis of culture in the broadest sense.<sup>19</sup>

Thus conceptualism, with its practice of theory in art, contributed to reshaping of the concepts of art and culture: art definitively lost its privileged position as an autonomous, disinterested concept and an elitist product of human spirit and all because it became part of culture in the broadest sense. While modernism interprets culture in the context of the opposition between high and mass culture, within postmodernistic key, culture is interpreted exclusively as a group of signifying social practices; in that sense, culture is a complex system of overlapping and confronting different discursive formations. Art has become a practice of analysis of a current social context within culture seen as a system of language. This is a key position that has been reached by both conceptual artists and theorists of constructionist orientation (primarily, French post-structuralism, and under its influence, somewhat later, British cultural studies): culture is no longer experienced as a group of elite artifacts that give „essence“ to history in general development of human spirit, i.e. as a civilizational criteria of the highest order, a guide „through the fog of everyday experiences and the banality of life“<sup>20</sup>, but the culture is interpreted as *discourse*.

Discourse is, thus, a central notion of the constructionist-relativistic theory of culture, i.e. of structuralist and post-structuralist theories:

In the beginning discourse, according to Benveniste, was considered as a sort of statement where all the signs and traces of expression were present. Then, the discourse implied the speech „out of context“, that brought and discovered all the characteristics of power, ideology, the nature of carriers of the discourse. In that sense, discourse is a speech of a social group, institution or society, thus, Foucault establishes a discursive analysis as „a discussion/ debate about techniques of expression, interpretation, representation of social and historical identities of knowledge in the Western culture.“ (Šuvaković).<sup>21</sup>

That is how monodisciplinary, essentialist and modernistic founded theory of art experiences its end and becomes transformed into interdisciplinary theory of culture. Its basic characteristics have become: 1. interdisciplinarity, which means that modern studies of art and media are a complex intertextual philosophical and theoretical platform that has not been applied any longer within narrow disciplinary framework (beauty in aesthetics, art in the history of art, mental processes of creation, and receptions in the psychology of art,

etc.), but the object of interest of modern theory of culture is a whole range of cultural phenomena that appear in the mutual overlap and which modernism saw as separate and autonomous fields of human action (art, literature, music, pop culture, media, fashion, clothes, food, means of mass communication, etc); 2. anti-essentialism, which means that there is no ontological foundation of the notion of art, but that art is a social construct, a practice, i.e. that in our cognition of the world we do not work with the phenomena themselves, but our cognition of the world is always mediated by language, i.e. culture; 3. anti-positivism, which means that there is no absolute „objective“ scientific language, but the speech always contains the relations of power, so that the goal of interdisciplinary theory of culture is a deconstruction of relations of power within a concrete historically determined society (these relation can refer to class, race, gender, generation, etc.); 4. a shift in the level of analysis from the artistic object to the recipient. The receiver, the recipient of artistic and media contents thus becomes a leading category of modern studies of culture, art and media.

This shift from monodisciplinarity towards interdisciplinarity, from essentialism towards constructivism, from the analysis of aesthetic phenomena towards the theory of reception is a process through which all the humanistic disciplines pass: aesthetics as a science about sensory, i.e. beautiful, becomes transformed into intertextual theory of culture,<sup>22</sup> the history of art becomes transformed into so-called „new art history“,<sup>23</sup> and a modern theory of media has been established as a scientific discipline.<sup>24</sup> Writing about cultural phenomena thus becomes a complex intertextual flow through spaces of aesthetics, history of art, theory of media, and theory of culture, in the most general sense.

German theorist Wolfgang Iser writes about the changes that occurred within aesthetics as an autonomous philosophical discipline. According to him, traditional, monodisciplinary founded aesthetics is an autonomous discipline, that above all deals with the notion of beautiful, i.e. with the general principles of art. Being such, modernistic aesthetics, despite some exceptions, becomes concentrated exclusively on the phenomenon of art. Basic lack of such determined discipline is primarily universal(istic) concept of art- instead of the universal notion, today, we can exclusively discuss about the different versions and concepts of art- classic aesthetics, thus, primarily overlooking the fact that that there is no „essence of art“. Monodisciplinary aesthetics has today been overcome, because in modern, consumer societies there occurs obvious global deterritorialization and reconfiguration of the aesthetic- the notion of the aesthetic is no longer reserved for art exclusively, but for the

whole everyday life ( body embellishment, creation of media-generated reality, etc.). Today's society is a system of domination of a media-generated image, where the difference between representation and simulation has been lost.<sup>25</sup> Simultaneously, the ocularcentric domination of vision and seeing, which is the assumption upon which originally aesthetics has been founded since Heraclitus (Οράκλειτος), over Leonardo da Vinci to Maurice Merleau Ponty, under the influence of media-generated spectacle, comes to its end- within the media-generated society and in media-simulated reality it is no longer possible to discuss about the hierarchy of senses; in that sense, hearing, e.g.

is being appreciated anew because of its anti-metaphysical proximity to the event instead of to permanent being, because of its essentially social character in contrast to the individualistic execution of vision, and because of its link with emotional elements in opposition to the emotionless mastery of phenomena through vision.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, derealisation of reality, reconfiguration of *aisthesis* and the whole new system of sensory sensations in modern society of spectacles (a change in perception of aesthetic phenomena), direct us towards transformation of aesthetics as a discipline: the new aesthetics implies the fact of different meanings and different contexts where the phenomenon of the aesthetic occurs - from art, over mass media and means of communication, all the way to everyday life within the contemporary postmodern consumer society. *Aisthesis* has no longer unambiguous, but utterly multivalent meaning that aesthetics as a discipline must take into consideration. Thus, it comes to overlapping with other disciplines, and to institutional broadening of the framework of aesthetics as a science. Its framework is no longer exclusively art, especially because today the idea of the autonomy of art has largely been rejected, and art has become an open media concept, where the works of art have lost their contemplative foundation. In other words, the reception of art is poliaesthetic, and not any longer monoaesthetic, i.e. today it is possible to discuss exclusively about transdisciplinary aesthetics:

Finally, what will the structure of the discipline of aesthetics be in the wake of such an expansion? My answer is surely not surprising: its structure will be transdisciplinary. I imagine aesthetics being a field of research which comprehends all questions concerning *aisthesis* with the inclusion of contributions from philosophy, sociology, art history, psychology, anthropology, neurosciences, and so on. *Aisthesis* forms the framework of the discipline. And art is one-but, as important as it might be, only one-of its subjects.<sup>27</sup>

It comes to similar changes within the history of art that has been transforming into so-called new art history, or, as asaslo called the implosion of interdisciplinarity into this classical discipline , into „critical“, i.e. „radical“ history of art. The phenomenon of the new art history emerges during the 80s, when methodological basis of the discipline was transformed. Those transformations include backing away from the historical and formalistic approaches towards a) Marxist and Post-Marxist theory of history, politics and society, b) feminist theory and criticism of patriarchy and woman's position within historical and current societies, c) psychoanalytic, primarily, Lacanian thesis about the visual representation and constitution of the social and sexual identity and d) semiologic and structuralistic concepts and methods in the analysis of signs and meanings.<sup>28</sup>

According to Jonathan Harris, the beginnings of the new history of art are related to the theoretic deconstruction of the modernistic notion of the autonomy of art and the modernistic concept of the elite culture introduced by Marxist and feminist oriented historians of art of the 70s, such as Timothy James Clark, i.e. Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock. These historians will start defining the social, materialistically oriented history of art in deconstructionist, relativistic and constructivist key:

One of the first rules that have been questioned was the rule of leaving out women artists from the canons of classical history of art. Now then followed the contextualization of the works of art, as well as the issue of limitation of the interpretative apparatus that was excluding the analyses of ideological, socio-political, psychoanalytic, racial and class theories. The prevailing feeling of the 70s was the fear that history of art, since its beginnings, had been dominated by a *master discourse* or canon, which, at the same time, had been speaking from the position of man and power.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, practically in the same period, there comes to establishment of the new discipline, related to the modern theory of culture- the interdisciplinary theory of media. The theory of media, as a discipline started with the establishment in the 60s, in different methodological fields: the constitutive role will certainly be played by American theorist Marshall McLuhan whose theses would overlap with the settings of the theorist of communication Harold Innis. The second „source“ of modern theory of media is the theory of information that develops under the influence of cybernetics and the thinkers such as Claude Shannon and Gregory Bateson. In the end, one should also mention the philosophy of symbolic forms of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne K. Langer.

Media theory as it is taught in art schools, colleges and universities contains three main currents. The first emanates from film and television studies and cultural studies with a focus on visual culture. The second springs from literary studies (...) an important third current is borne by artists producing machine art, interactive installations and network art, but also by non-university intellectuals who practice speculative media theory.<sup>30</sup>

However, approaches within modern theory of media can be divided into: general history of media, primarily based on the settings of Marshall McLuhan, who places the accent in the analysis not on the content of the media message, but on the medium itself (e.g. the representation of reality in painting is an illusionist representation, while exclusively material appearance of the image is what we experience as a message, a medium; related to this is McLuhan's maxima-, „medium is the message“). In that way, the three levels of the communicative act, between the recipient and the medium, are important: the level of information (the technical level), the level of symbolic meaning (the semantic level), and finally, the social level that implies the influence of media on forming social relationships.<sup>31</sup> McLuhan, thus, makes the difference between different media due to the quantity of information that the recipient receives through the communicational act via media: on one hand, there are cold media (they demand a certain dose of imagination from the recipient), and on the other hand, there are hot media (they give full, saturated information, by bombing the senses of the recipient, and not demanding his/her imagination).<sup>32</sup> The next to follow is a very important approach within the theory of media, the historical, that follows the social history of different media and their influence on social relationships in a concrete historical moment (e.g. in what way the development of writing had the influence on founding The Roman Empire in the old century, or in what way the development of mass media had influence on the formation of Nazism in Germany in 30's).<sup>33</sup> In the end, we can discuss about practical or applied theory of media which deals with concrete media forms and their specificities (the theory of photography, the theory of television and radio, the theory of new media, etc.). Finally, a special segment, especially when the reception of artistic and media contents issues are in question, represent modern studies of audience that stem from the studies of subcultures developed within the British cultural studies, over the analyses of fans, the gender theories of audience, all the way to the theories of virtual communities within the interactive space of the digital media (cyberspace, internet, video games, etc.).<sup>34</sup>



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## THREE SEQUENCES OF SITE-WRITING

### A B S T R A C T

The article is comprised of three exercises of “site writing” interrupted by theoretical and methodological intermissions. The sequences take the reader to a topographical and exegetical journey into various images, memory traces and narratives that treat reality as raw material for dreaming. Adopting architectural historian Jane Rendell’s critical framework of site writing, the article aims at radical spatialization of the sites through which narratives emerge, memories are revisited and possibilities for the future are suggested. Site writing is not writing about spaces, but writing spaces, engaging the materiality of the images and the phenomenological encounters with them through spatiality and positioning of the images. Thus, images become sites through which the narrative unfolds.

The image-sites that form the three key sequences include the juxtaposition of two towns- Kars and Giumry- in Turkey and in Armenia respectively in a way that the images of the townscapes neither comment, nor repeat, but double each other; a journey through Los Angeles’ Westin Bonaventure hotel and its relationship to the body and the landscape; and a reading of the latent possibilities of the material in artist Kasper Kovitz’s landscape paintings and installations.

### KEY WORDS

SITE-WRITING

IMAGE

LAW

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

LANDSCAPE

ARCHITECTURE

## INTRODUCTION

Several months ago I spent approximately four months trying to renew my passport through the Embassy of Armenia in Beirut. While waiting “before the Law” I thought I developed a profound understanding of the way in which bureaucracy calls for a radically embodied self. While waiting “before the Law” to receive my passport, not getting answers to numerous phone calls, connecting my heartbeat to the dial tone and the anticipation of a voice on the other end of the phone cord, and my voice changing from trembling and pleading to a forceful baritone, I understood that the abstraction and disembodiment of the subject as it gets inscribed in bureaucratic quagmires requires a radical exaggeration of the body’s psycho-somatic responses: it calls for a body that experiences pain and pleasure, a pulsating anxiety and jubilant pleasure “before the Law”. Thus, the administration of the subject does not take place at the expense of the elimination of the body/self, but precisely through a forceful embodiment.

In Kafka’s Parable “Before the Law”, Joseph K. spends a lifetime in front of the gate to enter the Law, but his entry is repeatedly prevented by the gatekeeper who has a sharp pointed nose, a fur coat and a thin, black Tartar’s beard. As Joseph K. grows old, he shrinks while the gatekeeper grows taller. “Finally his eyesight grows weak, and he does not know whether things are really darker around him or whether his eyes are merely deceiving him. But he recognizes now in the darkness an illumination which breaks inextinguishably out of the gateway to the Law. Now he no longer has much time to live. Before his death he gathers in his head all his experiences of the entire time up into one question which he has not yet put to the gatekeeper. He waves to him, since he can no longer lift up his stiffening body. The gatekeeper has to bend way down to him, for the great difference has changed things considerably to the disadvantage of the man. “What do you still want to know now?” asks the gatekeeper. “You are insatiable.” “Everyone strives after the law,” says the man, “so how is it that in these many years no one except me has requested entry?” The gatekeeper sees that the man is already dying and, in order to reach his diminishing sense of hearing, he shouts at him, “Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I’m going now to close it.”<sup>1</sup>

As disempowering as it might be to wait at the gate of the Law, Joseph K.’s anticipation is both a spatial and a temporal deferral of the Law that might open up some political possibilities for the constitution of subjectivity. This temporal “before” maintains the exteriority of the Law and constructs it as an object, against which the time of dwelling posits a *livability* possible only for

as long as the appearance of the Law is postponed.<sup>2</sup> But the Law is topology as well. It is a localizable space that comes only before and after, but never coincides with the subject's presence.

What interests me here, however, is not so much the way in which the abstract Law renders itself powerful because the decaying body of Joseph K. spends a lifetime at its gate, but the way in which the Law renders itself visible – an image that never fully materializes. As his sight diminishes, Law appears to Joseph K. as a form, “an illumination which breaks inextinguishably out of the gateway to the Law”<sup>3</sup> to which he is denied entry. The Law is exteriority that appears as an image, a form, only when one no longer sees. The image through which the Law renders itself visible is in turn governed by a set of conventions. Derrida poses the Law as a convention that constructs the narrative as literature, and the work of interpretation that the reader is engaged with. Is the reader positioned at the gateway of interpretation? Is s/he in the text or outside of it?<sup>4</sup> I would like to extend the question of interpretation to the reading of images. How do we recognize images? What are the conventions that define something as an image? How do we confront the visual that, according to George Didi-Huberman, defies the visible, and yet, is not invisible?<sup>5</sup> Are we inside images, outside of them, or do we spend a lifetime on their threshold, neither able to leave nor to enter?

## SEQUENCE 1: THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF RECOGNITION

The Empire projects itself as an image first and foremost through architecture. It scars a landscape by building upright standing structures in an attempt to reproduce the provinces in its own image. Architecture is a structure of edification, but edification embedded in the projection of the imperial power marks the other as ultimately not entirely edifiable and as always lacking the perfectly upright posture that would characterize the imperial subject proper. The Empire's image is both a phantasm calling for identification with it, but also an otherness that cannot be completely incorporated in the psychic economy of the imperial non-subject. Architecture simultaneously reflects and performs the ambiguity of phantasmal projection, of recognition and misrecognition, identification and misidentification, with the site from which the power emanates.

The day after the battle is for the administration of things: the Tsar calls for his master planners, imports ornamental motifs that are signifiers of the imperial glory and rushes in cartographers to redraft the existing maps. But

the architectural mirroring of imperial structures emanating from the center onto the provinces emerges as a slippage, hemorrhage, a bastard child of “the original”, and a distorted image. Thus the projection of the imperial power as an image is a flawed one. In the temporality through which the image of power travels from the center to the provinces, what remains of it is merely its shell, an ornament that betrays its original mission. The architecture of the provinces repeats and doubles the imperial glory, but this uncanny doubling produces an abyss, a hollowness that refuses to feed back into the image through which power attempts to render itself visible. If the relationship demanded between the Empire and its subjects is one of love and fidelity, architecture is the law that institutes that bondage.

Two towns are separated by a gorge and a now sealed border. I was born and grew up in one, and only heard stories from my grandfather about the other from where his parents had to escape in the early twentieth century. Kars, a town in Eastern Anatolia was of strategic importance for the Russian Empire in several consecutive wars with the Ottomans: 1828, 1855 1877 and the World War I. The town became the center of the governorate of Eastern provinces after the Crimean war when the Russian Empire took hold of it in 1878. The specific architecture of the provincial center that developed throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to house the bureaucratic organs of the Empire in order to administer the daily lives of the provincial subjects. This architecture of black and pink porous tuff, whose austere forms were occasionally punctured by delicate weld work or wooden ornamentation, emerged as the replica of nineteenth century Russian imperial architecture. Yet, its raw materiality, its fragile resistance towards delicate handwork because of the precarious porosity of the stone, betrayed its infidelity to the “original”. Nineteenth century Imperial architecture of Tsarist Russia in turn had developed as an amalgam of the structure of traditional Russian *izbushka* (hut) and French *Belle Epoque* neo-classical elements imported by Peter the Great – that dedicated Europhile who forced his boyars to shave off their “barbarian” beards.

These stone houses often had two stories and a wooden balcony, most of them located on the slope of the hills and extending towards the top. It is these hills that define the topography of the town. Right after securing Kars as its stronghold in Eastern Anatolia in 1878, the Empire brought in architects and urban planners to transform the southern plateau of the city into a new town surrounded by walls with multiple towers. A new Russian church was immediately built, together with single level spacious shops, most of them with



black tuff and tin roofs, often painted in white or pink. In official Armenian historiography one reads:

The union of Kars with Russia was of a major progressive significance. Similar to Eastern Armenia's earlier unification with Russia, this part of the country also started enjoying progress in economy and culture... Law and order was instituted, and the inhabitants became exposed to incomparably higher and more developed Russian culture.<sup>6</sup>

Giumry, the town I grew up in, is separated from Kars with a gorge, a river and now a blockaded border. From the very first day when the Russian troops marched into the Ararat valley in 1805, they conquered the town from Persia and used it as a strategic point to occupy the entire valley as well as expand towards the East, the provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The words of a nineteenth century enlightenment writer Khachatur Abovian still have ghostly reverberations: "Blessed be the hour when the Russian foot stepped on the Armenian soil."<sup>7</sup>

Kars and Giumry shared an often quite mobile population of Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Ezidis, and in many ways, Kars was built as a replica of Giumry. After the Russian conquest, the city was named Alexadrapol after Alexander II. It is here that most of the population of Kars emigrated to between 1915-1920, during the massacres carried out by the Ottomans.

As I grew up in Giumry, I witnessed its many layers (the Russian, the Soviet, the post-Soviet) converging and clashing, as if it was a battle of various pasts enacted upon architecture. However, this symbolic battle was not merely one between various ideologies of the past and ideals for the future. A natural



Image 1. Kars, Turkey. Photograph by Angela Harutyunyan.



Image 2. Giumry, Armenia. Photograph by Aras Ozgun, 2009.



disaster in 1988 came to the aid in this symbolic battle by erasing much of the Soviet landscape and exposing the nineteenth century Tsarist townscape in its nakedness. But I never suspected that Giumry had its uncanny double until I arrived to Kars in 2006. And it was not the childhood stories of my grandfather than I had already filtered through a critical distance and disidentification, but the very materiality of the city that arrested me, before I could even enter into its semiotic structure. The familiarity of the place was not based on associations triggered through the empirically constructed space that go along the lines of “this reminds me of...”, but the horror of the double (Image 1 and 2). In Freud’s sense, the uncanny is an aesthetic notion, a notion that pertains to the “quality of feelings” triggered by the quality of things. He says that “The ‘uncanny’ is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (heimlich). But the familiar is stretched to such an extent that it ambiguously reaches its opposite – the unheimlich in which “the prefix -un is the token of repression.”<sup>8</sup>

The doubling of the two towns not only in the sense of architectural sameness, but also the exactitude of their afterlife creates double ghosts: the ghost of the empirical repetition and the ghostly repetition of this ghost in the afterlives of the two towns. But the uncanny is also profoundly connected to narcissism in that the doubling springs from self-love, from the desire to project oneself to eternity (afterlife, soul, ghost, etc.). The power of the Empire renders itself as a phantasmagoric image through architectural doubling, a narcissus absorbed by its own image in a perpetual present that demands love and fidelity from its subjugated others. But the ambiguity with doubles, as Freud has been telling us, is that they turn from reassurances of eternity (ghosts, souls) to the ghostly harbingers of death.

### Intermission

In “You Tell Me” architectural historian Jane Rendell offers “site-writing”, a spatial narrative constructed through topographical fiction and existing visual codes within a space informed by subjective experiences.<sup>9</sup> But the space itself is never a given but comes into being through the embodied experience. Site-writing is not writing about spaces but writing spaces, engaging with images through their own intrinsic materiality and spatial positioning. It is not an ekphrasis, but an exegesis that opens the images to the possibility of seeing and un-knowing and knowing and un-seeing. Exegesis does not form a discourse that invents the object in its own image, but if need be, resigns before the image that exceeds both the interpretation and its own materiality. The topography of the image is not the topography of our empirical space.

It is dreamlike topography in which various spatialities and temporalities converge, overlap and clash. It is a dreamwork in a Freudian sense, understood as a condensed space/time in which “sheds [are] put together”. The space of the image and the space of the dreamwork collide in yet another sense: they both offer visual intensity that is comprised of contradictory, clashing and overlapping composites, and yet take the referent as a material for the dream/image work.

## SEQUENCE 2: THE SPACE UNDONE

Power demands its material support. The reflective surfaces of skyscrapers conceal their structure and materiality with the promise of infinite virtualization. Their substance appears as nothing but their own appearance, the surface that reflects the surrounding with the effect of infinite regression and mirroring. As a hall of mirrors it projects a sublime presence of effortlessness. The skyscraper is a myth of a historic necessity and a natural order of things, two sides of the same coin. The postmodern skyscraper projects itself onto other surfaces while being constituted by these surfaces as a holograph, a pure transparency of instant materialization and de-materialization. The skyscraper is connected with other structures through bridges and underpasses, it is a pure network that epitomizes the networked structure of the only pertinent ideology of our times: that of the global financial system.

I arrive to Westin Bonaventure hotel downtown Los Angeles, and enter the labyrinthine maze of the lobby through a half-concealed and lateral entrance on Figueroa street that provides a closure to the hotel rather than an opening. The lobby seems to provide the only foundation upon which the four disjointed glass towers hover, suspended between the ground and the sky (Image 3). The



Image 3-4. Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles. Photograph by Angela Harutyunyan, 2012.

lobby is also the only walkable space in the entire structure where otherwise disjointed parts are connected through dozens of elevators and escalators. One can go up in an elevator in each of the four disconnected towers that spring up from the atrium. In an attempt to restore the coordinates of bodily orientation, each tower has its own coded color to guide the visitor to hotel rooms. Each tower has one and a single referent: Los Angeles itself with its sprawling network structure (Image 4).

Each and every time I am compelled to document my journey to the twenty forth floor and back to the ground floor lobby. Each journey is different since the elevator will stop on different floors to carry other guests, thus the rhythm of the video will change upon these stoppages. In addition, there are at least twenty possibilities to make different videos from various vantage points and angles. The journey consists of two parts: firstly the elevator shoots through the ceiling of the enclosed atrium in what seems to be a much faster pace because of the closeness of the walls and other structural elements to the glass shell of the elevator. The pace of the journey seems slower and the position of the onlooker becomes panoptical once one leaves the “Lower Circle” (in Dante’s sense) of the material structure and appears suspended between the ground and the sky, surrounded by the sprawling city. The downward journey is more dramatic, and reverses the dialectic between openness and closure: the journey culminating in the “inferno” of the hotel lobby with the elevator literally splashing into the artificial lake.

I am constantly in the image, the image that projects its glittery surface as a phantasmagoric space of inclusion, yet excludes those who inhabit the other side of downtown Los Angeles – the homeless, the drug addicts, alcoholics, former inmates, drag queens, who dwell under the bridges and in the riverbed. Yet, while in the image, I want to externalize it, to split myself from it and to regain my body that has been violently turned into a reflection. It has been deprived of its capacity to move freely and is being carried through automated devices such as elevators and escalators. Or rather, I want to eject myself out of the image by putting the burden of seeing on the camera/eye.

While I am between the visual trap I submitted myself to and the critical distance I force myself to inhabit, I recall Fredric Jameson’s paragraphs on Westin Bonaventure. For, Jameson locates a radical rupture with modernist architecture that inhabits the surrounding cityscape with its utopian promise as a disjunctive proposition for a different aesthetics of living than the surrounding environment can accommodate in the present. Instead, John Portman’s 1977 building “seeks to speak [the] very language [of its surrounding environment],

its lexicon and syntax”, and acts as a “populist insertion into the city fabric... As a total space, it corresponds to a new collective practice ... something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hyper-crowd.”<sup>10</sup>

The escalators and elevators that occupy a special place in Jameson’s description as well as in Portman’s architecture, epitomize what Jameson calls “a dialectical heightening” of the process of narrativisation of architecture that the visitors have to fulfill. He continues: “It seems to me that not only do the escalators and elevators here henceforth replace movement, but also and above all designate themselves as new reflexive signs and emblems of movement proper... Here the narrative stroll has been underscored, symbolized, reified and replaced by a transportation machine which becomes the allegorical signifier of that older promenade we are no longer allowed to conduct on our own. This is a dialectical intensification of the autoreferentiality of all modern culture, which tends to turn upon itself and designate its own cultural production as its content.”<sup>11</sup>

Jameson’s principle point is that in postmodern architecture, as it is epitomized in Portman’s iconic building, the body is forced into heightened mobility alongside with the infinite mobility of other signs and semiotic systems that define the space, but the trajectories and pace of this movement are always already prescribed by automated devices that carry the body. It is no longer the body that organizes its own perceptual space and maps itself onto it. It is now the space that carries the body through and within it and “maps cognitively [the body’s] position in a mappable external world.”<sup>12</sup> The implications of this disjoining are much more profound than simply the relationship between the body and the built environment. What is at stake is a production of the subjectivity within this newly networked hyperspace and which reflects “the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global, multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.”<sup>13</sup>

## Intermission

The topographical approach to images as material sites demands that the site-writer investigates the position s/he occupies in relation to images, the locations these images are inscribed in and refer to and the spatial issues they raise, not only conceptually and ideologically, but also materially and emotionally, in order to write texts that locate the spatial themes triggered by an encounter with images in written form.<sup>14</sup> Not only the beholder, the writer positions herself and her body in relation to images, but the way images are encountered

becomes significant. It is almost like the objective chance of the surrealists: a *détournement* of discovering the marvelous: a predetermined contingency that cannot happen otherwise but at the same does not have to happen. According to Jane Rendell, site-writing or topography is a constant move back and forth, between the inside and the outside – the images with which the writer engages invite her inside but also define her as always external.<sup>15</sup>

Writing images as sites is to enter into a labyrinthine maze where the narratives are placed inside one another, and where one is to get lost. Site-writing defies the art historical search for the truth of the referent and resemblance, and bypasses the architectural and temporal coordinates of the mausoleum (museum) in which images are fixed and the space is pre-configured. The domain of the images is the rein of the Minotaur that traps the one attempting to enter the maze of interlacing spatialities. Here I am not offering a reading of images that provides a rational explanation of their iconography, catalogues stylistic references or attempts to locate factual truths, but I am proposing to spend a lifetime before artistic images, the way in which Joseph K. spent a lifetime before the Law. But instead of a lifetime spent, I am proposing an exegesis that opens up the images to a multiplicity of meanings but also, towards the impossibility of knowing that defies the myth of their omni-translatability.<sup>16</sup>

### SEQUENCE 3: EFFACING TRACES OF LABOR

Narrative painting has been one of the greatest causalities of the twentieth century. First it was overcome by modernism as a vestige of the Ancien Régime for the sake of painting's triumphant reduction to the physicality of the medium as the culmination of its teleological evolvement. Then it was deconstructed by postmodernism because of its ideological connotations, and has rarely marked a comeback under post-medium conditions.

In her recent book *Under Blue Cup* art historian Rosalind Krauss attempts to salvage the medium as technical support by those practitioners who re-invent it in the post-medium oblivion brought about by installation art and the institutional critique of the white cube. Several years ago Krauss underwent extensive mnemonic therapy to re-learn to connect signs with signifiers after aneurysm – a condition when “an exploded artery launches a cataract into the brain disconnecting synapsis and washing the neurons away.”<sup>17</sup> Taking this recovery as a metaphor, she argues for the memory of the medium is a set of rules, a unified discourse for a given period that is both recalled and reinvented. Unlike the Greenbergian formalist reductionism of the medium to the physicality of its

support, Krauss asks the question of the “who you are” of the medium in terms of technical support. “I am substituting ‘technical support’ for the traditional idea of the medium... technical supports are generally borrowed from mass cultural forms like animated films, automobiles, investigative journalism, or movies – hence, ‘technical’ replace the ‘artisanal’ materials of the guilds.”<sup>18</sup> Krauss’ “knights of the medium” include Ed Rusha whose technical supports are automobiles, William Kentridge whose “elaboration of animation by means of painstaking erasure” recalls the memory of the medium, and Haroun Farocki who “foregrounds the video’s editing bench”, amongst others.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, Krauss strives to salvage the visual from its obliteration by those practices that harness a fundamental distrust towards the ontology of the medium. If the technical support is the “discursive unity” of a given epoch, the way in which the checkered board served as a support (in the sense of providing a set of rules) for the Renaissance linear perspective, can landscape become such a support for narrative painting in the post-medium condition? Can the narrative be told through the very materials that it inhabits?

Artist Kasper Kovitz’ works consistently weave a single narrative. However, this is a narrative that has a multiplicity of paths and a variety of stories depending on which path the beholder takes. It is as in a fairy tale where the protagonist faces several paths and has to choose only one based on pure chance or intuition. Here a rational choice is of no help, but the paths chosen are those that lead to a manifest destiny. Kovitz’s landscape paintings and three-dimensional works that support these narratives, however, are not *about* a story, but they are a story. One could call them “surviving images” that carry the memory of the medium, and yet re-invent it with their latency and tenacity. The various narrative paths that one takes in these landscapes are trails in dense forests, footprints on ice lakes, tracks in abandoned gardens and roads



Image 5. Kasper Kovitz, Ice House. Still from the video. Nova Scotia, Canada, 2010. Courtesy of the Artist



Image 6. Kasper Kovitz, Common Prayers - eucharist [Buzzard Roost; Lake Greenwood SC], pencil on discarded under-bed, 2000. Courtesy of the Artist.



in villages trodden by those who pursue manifest destiny, or no one at all. In *Icehouse* of 2010, the landscape literally becomes a support structure that sustains the pencil drawings graphed on the wall during Kovitz's two-week stay in a trailer on an icy lake in Canada, but also literally bears the artist's life supports – the ice house and his body (Image 5). Here the relationship between Kovitz and the landscape is one of trust. But the danger of trust and the danger of medium specificity are, as Stanley Cavell tells us, inherent in the experience of art and the experience of inhabiting the present.<sup>20</sup>

Kovitz's landscapes of memory are punctured or zipped through by an intrinsic element that is ejected out of the landscape, yet belongs to it. The tension between a seeming harmony and its disturbance, the serenity of landscapes and the traces of violence and history "contaminating" them is articulated at the level of the materials and forms. These landscapes have been violated doubly: being turned into a flat image through mechanical reproduction (he always takes a postcard or a photograph as a starting point), they are consigned to the nomadic life of exchangeable signs, but they also bear traces of the desire for conquest. Nevertheless, there is no original innocence that they can regain.

The series *Common Prayers* is based on an old postcard of Buzzard Roost; Lake Greenwood in South Carolina. What comes first is *Common Prayers-Eucharist* of 2001 – a pencil drawing on a dirty under-bed (Image 6). Here the fragile outlines of the landscape graphed with pencil on a discarded under-bed are punctured by stains embedded within the material. These outlines carry the memory of the stain, yet they reinvent the medium through their accidental character. The artist explains that he thought of the work as the "tabula rasa" that "land-takers" (in this case Puritans) hoped to find. "Eucharist" is referred to in its ancient Greek meaning of "Thanks Giving", but also as a religious



Image 7. Kasper Kovitz, *Common Prayers - all the friends I ever had are gone* [Buzzard Roost; Lake Greenwood SC], cutout pre-formed polyethylene pond, 2001. Courtesy of the Artist.

term for the most significant magical transformation around which the rite of a mass is centered.<sup>21</sup> But this tabula rasa revokes the abject as it has been already stained by those sleeping on the under-bed. This is followed by *Common Prayers: Recreation*, which is a failed attempt at reconstructing the landscape in its three-dimensionality. The final piece in the series *Common Prayers – All the Friends I Ever Had Are Gone* (Image 7) transfers the outlines of the landscape on cutout-preformed polyethylene that forms a pond. The matter contained within the curvilinear frame becomes a negative image of the photograph of the original landscape. The pond is punctured by a hole that serves as the punctum of the image, belonging to it, yet creating a caesura within the still recognizable form of the landscape.

As yet another attempt at recreating the landscape in its three dimensions, the work moves further away from the found post-card. The landscape is rather no longer represented, but becomes a technical support that precariously holds the forms together. Kovitz claims that there is an obviousness that signifies a state for him, where the closer one gets to recreation the further one gets away from it at the same time. He quotes the poet Philip Larkin who, when answering the question “What have you learned from other poets?” in an interview for the 1982 *Paris Review*, replies: “NOT TO BE AFRAID OF THE OBVIOUS.” Kovitz further states: “Merriam Webster has “obvious” as: 1) *archaic*: being in the way or in front, and only 2) easily discovered, seen, or understood. I kept and keep revisiting this poetic scare in my work and it holds a fascination for me, but also comes with a sense of dread, of utter departure, of reaching an end and feeling the cold of utter loneliness.”<sup>22</sup>

In *Neversink* (2011) the landscape of Neversink Dam in New York goes through a multiplicity of dimensional transformations in such a way that it

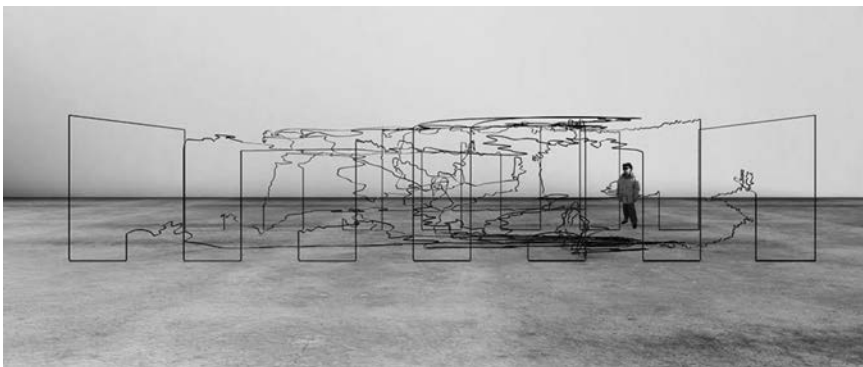


Image 8. Kasper Kovitz, *Neversink*, ½" cold – rolled steel pipe, Length: 42' 9", 13m 29cm, Width: 13' 4", 4m 7cm Height: 8" 4", 2m 54cm, 2011. Courtesy of the Artist.



Image 9. Kasper Kovitz, *Rate Your Progress*, Schoharie, New York, 2009. Courtesy of the Artist.



no longer reproduces the Cartesian coordinates even in its three-dimensional spatialization. Kovitz chooses a postcard of the Dam (the space rendered as a reproducible two-dimensional image), then transfers the outlines of the landscape back onto the third dimension. However, this double translation betrays the actual landscape as a referent since the work that emerges is a maze of discreet lines, a result of “tracing” (both in a sense of technicality and as a trace) that envelopes the viewer’s body (Image 8). The doubly transformed three-dimensionality appears as strange, vertiginous and dazzling since it both promises reconstitution of the familiar spatial coordinates but then withdraws that promise. The rigid frame supposed to provide a support structure, a grounding to regain the Cartesian coordinates, clashes with the intensity of the moving lines, the lines that run through the unyielding outlines as its electrified nervous system.

Rate Your Progress (2009) is based on a reproduced image of a jungle in Vietnam cleared due to a fallen bomb (Image 9). The forest that would otherwise see no light becomes an index in the three-dimensional rendering of the image where the referent collapses. What is left is the experience of the place; an experience that has not been lived. The six constructed walls cannot contain matter violently puncturing the walls and aggressively threatening the viewer’s entry.

Kovitz uses post-painterly materials to make paintings: fox’s urine, bear scat, pine sap and coffee, amongst others. But these materials carry the traces of narratives in them, or rather; they are what I would call paradox-materials since they point to a referent that has escaped (Image 10). They function as indexes pointing to a story that has disappeared, as if from a crime scene. Here the story is not to be found behind the painting, but in the opacity of materials,



Image 10. Kasper Kovitz, Parime [Ponce de Leon], oxblood on paper 29 5/8" x 22 11/16", 75.2 x 57.6cm, 2010. Courtesy of the Artist.



Image 11. Kasper Kovitz, No title; coyote urine; 2008; 9 1/2" x 12 3/8, 2009. Courtesy of the Artist.

as visually transparent as these might seem. The promise of the transparency of the sign as providing a key to decoding the painting runs against the opaque materiality of the image. But often, the paradox-materiality of the landscape (as a technical support) through its thickness, but also elusiveness conceals the image from immediate visibility. Thus, the beholder is to pull the image out of its latency so that it enters the domain of the visual. This viscosity in turn is haptic in that the viewer's body/brain is activated in the process of the materialization of the image by pulling it out of its latency (Image 11). The landscape as technical support holds the precariousness of the image that is yet to materialize but at the same time is on the verge of collapse. This requires that the viewer gets closer to the painting to penetrate its materiality. The viewer is compelled to visually crop and cut it, to exercise violence over it, the violence of the gaze that has a capacity to frame that which has been already pre-framed. Yet, the intrusive order of the gaze surgically intervenes into the very matter of what promises a coherent and instantaneous visual consumption. The viewing subject, in turn, is split between the desire to comprehend the whole and the need to break it apart. This is the long *duree* of the image, its temporality exceeding the physicality of its medium.

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PHOTO ESSAY:  
LANGUAGE, GAZE AND SPACE /  
THE ARCHITECTURAL UNCONSCIOUS

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